



The HILL
of ADVENTURE

ADAIR ALDON



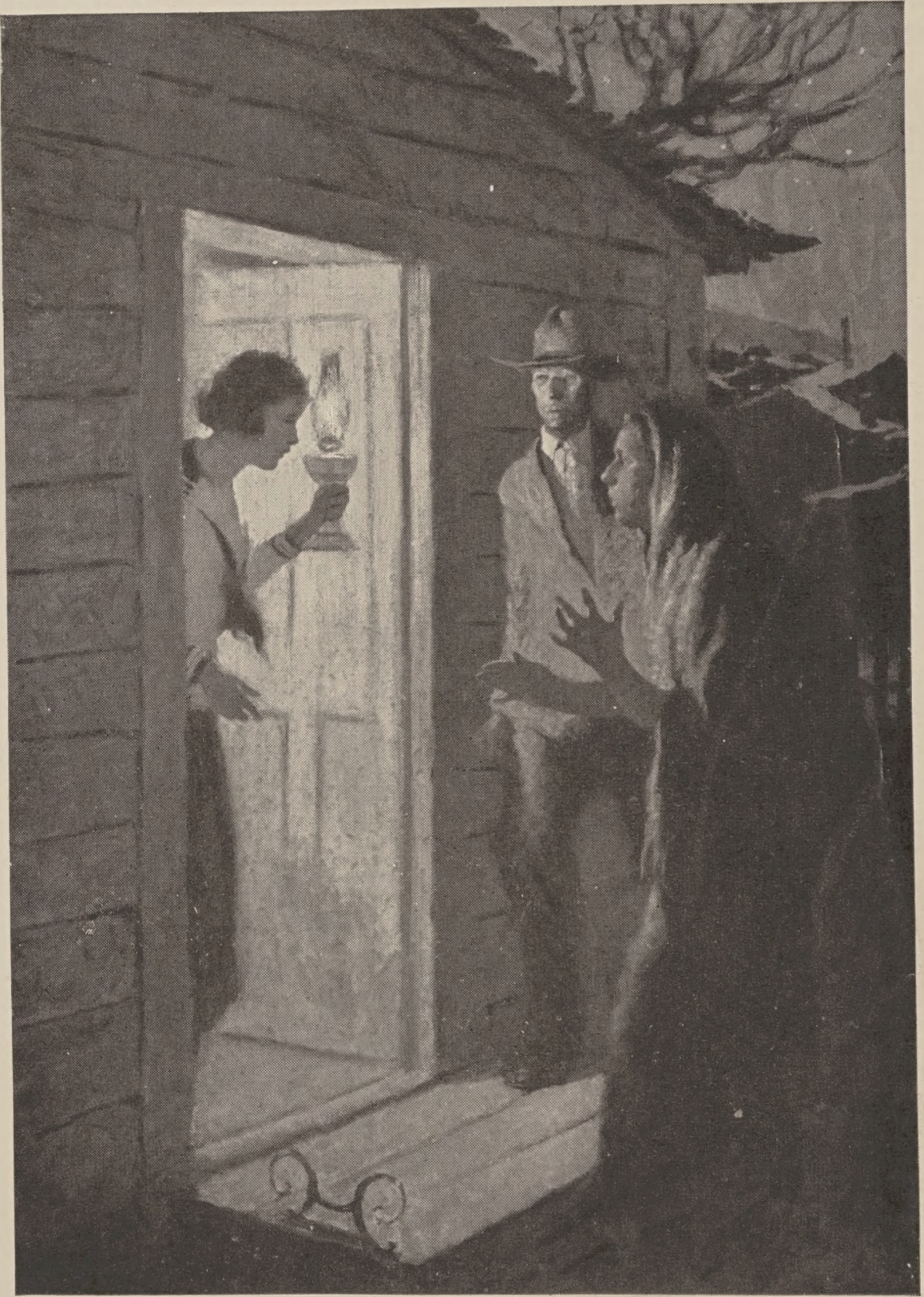
Class PZ7

Book M515

Copyright N^o Hi

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

Copy 2



"Things have broken loose quicker than we thought"

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

BY

ADAIR ALDON ✓ *pseud.*

Author of "AT THE SIGN OF THE TWO HEROES," etc.

Cornelia Lynde Meigs

✓
ILLUSTRATED BY
J. CLINTON SHEPHERD /



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1922

Copy 2

PZ7

M 515

Hz
Copy 2

Copyright, 1922, by
THE CENTURY CO. ✓



\$1.75

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

SEP 19 1922 ✓

©CLA683279 e 2

no 2

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN	3
II THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING	22
III NEIGHBORS	42
IV SHERLOCK HOLMES	62
V CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL	90
VI OLAF	106
VII "MY BROTHER JACK"	120
VIII MRS. BRUIN	136
IX A DECISION	153
X DABNEY'S CLUE	171
XI OVER THE PASS	190
XII DEAD MAN'S MILE	203
XIII "OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES"	224
XIV HASTY WORDS	242
XV A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA	263

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Things have broken loose quicker than we thought"	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
"It is you who do not understand," he returned gravely	82
He had only to lift his voice, and the long spell would be broken	162
Beatrice found herself telling what had happened .	272

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

IT was with feelings of doubt that were not very far from dismay that Beatrice Deems watched her new acquaintance, Dan O'Leary, saddle her recently acquired horse. She had ridden before, of course, in the tan-bark ring of the riding-school or on shady bridle-paths in the park, always on well-broken steeds whose beauty and grooming were equaled only by their good manners. But now, as she stood in her short khaki riding-skirt and her high boots, waiting outside the great dilapidated shed that, in this little Montana town, did duty as a livery-stable, she was beginning to wonder whether she really knew anything

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

about horses at all. Certainly she had never thought of riding anything like this plunging creature who stood straight up on his hind legs one moment, then dropped to his forefeet and stood on them in turn, with the ease of a circus performer.

She had spent only two days in Ely, the little town planted beside Broken Bow Creek, in the foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains. At first she had thought that the village, with its scattered box-like houses and dusty, shadeless street, was disappointingly unlike the West of the pictures-books and the movies. The antics of her new horse, however, were disturbingly like what she had witnessed in Wild West shows.

"Name's Buck," volunteered the man who was struggling with the saddle, and added, though in a tone that seemed to indicate the explanation as quite unnecessary, "It's on account of his color, you know."

"Oh!" returned Beatrice, a little blankly.

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

For the life of her, she could think of nothing else to say. She had yet to learn that all Western ponies of that golden buckskin shade of coat bear the same name. At the moment she was tempted to believe that the title had something to do with the way in which the horse was humping his back like a gigantic cat and jumping up and down on his nimble white forefeet.

"Your father went out on the range and chose the horse himself when he was out here getting your house ready," Dan went on. "He could n't have found another pony in the valley that could go like this one."

"Did he—did he try him?" Beatrice wished to know.

Her feelings in the matter were oddly mixed, for she dreaded the moment when she must actually mount to the big, unfamiliar saddle, and yet she was all on fire to try the horse's speed.

"No, he did n't try him," was the answer.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

“He just said he wanted a safe horse for his daughter, liked the looks of this one—and well he might,—and took my word for it that the horse would suit and would go like greased lightning, besides. There, now, the saddle’s firm. You mustn’t think anything of the way he acts when you pull up the cinch; they all do that!”

For all her misgivings, Beatrice was no coward. She stepped forward, discovered in one violent second that a Western pony sets off the moment he feels the rider’s weight on the stirrup, then flung herself, somehow, into the saddle and was away.

“I did not do that very well,” she was thinking. “Another time—oh, oh!”

For her very thought was interrupted by the sudden rush of wordless delight as the horse beneath her stretched himself to that long easy lope that is like nothing else in the world. The fresh mountain wind, sweeping down from the clean, high peaks above, sang

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

in her ears; the stony road swung past below; the motion was as easy as a rocking-chair but seemed as swift as thought itself. Motoring she had always loved, but she confessed with sudden disloyalty that it was bumpy business compared to the measured swaying of this living creature between her knees. Buck's personal prejudices seemed, indeed, to be directed solely against the cinching of the saddle. That process once over he was as eager and happy as she to clatter across the bridge, pass the last of the ugly little houses and the high-fronted store buildings, and turn his white-blazed face toward the mounting trail that led out of the valley.

Beatrice drew rein when they had breasted the first rise, and paused a moment to look back. The houses strewn haphazard across the slope below her made more of a town than she had thought. There was the packing-box railroad station where she and her sister, Nancy, and their Aunt Anna had arrived so

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

recently; there was the house where they were living, a little larger than the others, but square, hideous, and unshaded like the rest.

“We must n’t care for architecture,” Nancy had said when they first surveyed their dwelling rather ruefully, “when the Rocky Mountains begin in our back yard.”

There was also the winding stream with its abrupt bend that warranted the title of Broken Bow Creek, a mere trickle of water just now, in that wide, dry valley down which the thin line of the railroad stretched away, with the straight parallel of the rails seeming to bend and quiver in the hot clearness of the sunshine. South of the town was a portion of Ely that she had not seen before, a group of warehouses, some office buildings, and a huddle of workmen’s bunk-houses. She could see the cobweb lines of temporary railroad, a steam-shovel moving on a flat-car, and innumerable men toiling like black ants along

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

the sides of the raw cut that had been made in the red soil of the valley.

"That must be the irrigation ditch that Dan O'Leary was telling us about," she reflected. "How hot it looks down there! I did not dream they had so many men. And how clear the air is! Oh, surely, surely, Aunt Anna will get well here as fast as we hope!"

The wind lifted Buck's yellow mane and her own brown hair, while the horse pawed the stony ground impatiently. She let him go on, for she was in truth as eager as he. This was the first day that she had found time to go far from their own house, and she had now a most fascinating goal before her. What girl of sixteen would not feel excited over the prospect of exploring a tract of mountainside woods of which she was sole owner?

Beatrice had never quite understood how her father had come to purchase that stretch of land above Ely; she had not, indeed,

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

thought to ask. She had come into his study one Sunday morning when he was going over his papers and had surprised him with the announcement that she was sixteen that day. Having no other present ready, he had brought out some dusty title-deeds and had made them over to her.

“It will never be of the least use to you, my dear,” he said, “so do not consider it much of a present. Twenty-three acres with timber, cabin, and a waterfall, so the description reads, but you must not think they are worth anything. I have never seen the place myself.”

She had believed that it was on account of this talk about Ely that they thought of the town again when the doctors had prescribed for Aunt Anna “a change of climate—some dry, bracing place in the West.” She was their only aunt, Mr. Deems’s younger sister, and she had cared for his household ever since the death of the two girls’ mother years ago. She was a slim, frail person of indomitable

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

spirit, and had begun to look as though she were far more spirit than body ever since the influenza epidemic had swept through the family. Beatrice had always thought that going to Ely was her own suggestion, though she could not deny that it was Aunt Anna who had carried the plan through in the face of some rather unaccountable opposition from her father. Mr. Deems had finally given in, and had made a flying trip to Ely to be sure that the air and climate were what they wanted, to choose a house, engage a Chinese cook, and make all preparations for a summer's stay for his sister and the two girls.

"I did not have time to visit your estate on the hill, Beatrice," he said on his return. "You will have to explore it yourself. Dan O'Leary has charge of it and said he rented it to some engineers who were surveying the mountain, but it is unoccupied now. The place may prove to be a good picnic ground but I fear it has no other possibilities."

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

He might say what he chose, Beatrice was thinking, but he could not destroy her eagerness to see the place. The trail ran crookedly upward before her, disappeared in some dense pine woods, then slanted across the spur of the mountain and vanished again. Higher above rose the bare, rocky slopes of the tall peak that dominated the whole valley, Gray Cloud Mountain, on one of whose lower, rugged shoulders lay her land and her cabin. After climbing for a quarter of a mile, she was obliged to hesitate at a fork in the way, uncertain which of the steep paths she was to take.

A little cottage clung to the bare hillside by the road—a shabby place with no paint and a patched roof. The door was swinging open as she passed and a man just going in, a short-set, foreign-looking person, who scowled at her over his shoulder when she asked the way.

“That one,” he said briefly, pointing to the

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

right-hand fork and speaking with a heavy foreign accent. "Up toward John Herrick's house, only not so far."

He went in and shut the door abruptly. Beatrice could hear his voice inside calling roughly, "Christina, Christina!"

He had a roll of large papers in his hand, posters that he had evidently been putting up along the way, for she had observed them on trees and fence-posts nearer town. They seemed to announce a meeting of some sort, with English words at the top and odd foreign printing at the bottom in more than one language. She had felt a hot flash of indignant anger at the man's surly tone, but in a moment she had forgotten him completely, as she and Buck went scrambling up the steep and difficult road.

She came at last to a tiny bridge. Broken Bow Creek, which was little more than a series of pools in the parched stream-bed in the valley, was here a singing rivulet, flowing below

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the rude crossing amid a group of silvery aspen-trees. At the left of the trail she could see a gate, a set of bars hung between two rough posts. It was with a beating heart that she dismounted to take them down for Buck to pass. Once inside she would be on her own ground.

The agility of a mountain-bred pony was so new to her that she was much astonished, after she had removed two of the bars, to have Buck step over the remaining three as neatly as a dog would have done. She slipped into the saddle again, making a greater success than at the first attempt, and followed the nearly invisible path. The huge straight pine-trees stood in uneven ranks all about her, their branches interweaving overhead, the ground covered with their red-brown needles that muffled the sound of the horse's hoofs. Up they went, with the splash of falling water sounding louder and ever louder. Here at last was the place she sought, a square, sturdy cabin of

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

gray logs chinked with white plaster, with a solid field stone chimney and a sloping roof drifted over with pine-needles. She slid from the saddle and stood upon the rugged doorstep. Here was her house, her very own!

It was a larger dwelling than she had expected and very solidly and substantially built. She found that wooden bars had been nailed across the doors and windows, and she had, moreover, forgotten to obtain the keys from Dan O'Leary, so that she could not go in. She could, however, peep through the casement windows and see the low-ceilinged rooms, the rough stairs, and the wide fireplace. The big trees nodded overhead, the roar of the waterfall came from beyond the house, the creek, rushing and tumbling, slid away down the mountainside. Somebody had planted pansies on both sides of the step, pansies that crowded and jostled each other as they only can in the cool air of the high mountains, spreading sheets of gleaming color over the

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

barren soil. With a quivering sigh, Beatrice sat down upon the step.

“Mine!” she said aloud, just to see how it would sound. “Mine!”

It would take a long time to explore the place thoroughly.

“I must be able to tell Nancy about every bit of it,” she told herself.

Yet first she sat very quietly, for a little, on the rough stone step. She had hurried up the hill, eager to see the new place; she had been hurrying for the last two days, getting the house in the village settled; she had hurried before the journey: when indeed had she not been hurrying? It was very pleasant to sit so still and let the silent minutes march by to the tune of rustling pine branches and the murmuring waterfall. As she sat looking down into the valley, time seemed very big and calm and empty, instead of bustling and full.

She rose at last to go on with her explorations. Behind the cabin was the tumbling cas-

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

cade that identified the place, a plunge of foaming waters over a high ledge with a still black pool below, shot with gleams of sunshine and full of darting trout. Beyond the stream, almost hidden from sight by the high slope of the ravine, was the roof of another house, a larger one than hers, with a whole group of chimneys sending forth a curl of smoke to indicate that here were neighbors. Looking up the course of the brook she could see where the dense shadows of the pine grove ended and the waters ran in brighter sunshine on the higher slope.

"I should like to see what it is like up there," she thought, "but I must be quick; it is getting late."

She went scrambling up the rocky slope, feeling a little breathless, but forgetting entirely that in such a high altitude haste is far from wise. In a moment her lungs seemed entirely empty and her heart began to pound against her side, but she pressed on, deter-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

mined to reach a certain high rock before she turned back. It was a rash desire, for presently she was obliged to lie down upon the rough grass to gasp and rest and gather herself together for another effort. She got up to struggle forward again, for she was not used to abandoning a fixed purpose, but after a few yards she was forced to lie down once more, panting and completely exhausted.

"I don't believe I understand the Rocky Mountains," she reflected as she lay, limp and flat, looking across the barren valley, the sparsely wooded slopes, to the rising peaks opposite. She had been accustomed to mountains like the Adirondacks, round and covered thick with forest almost to the summit, friendly heights that invited one to climb them. It was a far cry from them to the precipitate slopes of Gray Cloud Mountain.

When she had recovered a little she gave up her project and slid humbly down the steep way she had come. Buck, with his bridle over

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

the post at the cabin door, whinnied an anxious welcome as she came back to him. He had been searching for tufts of grass between the stones, and had also nipped at the pansies, but had found them not to his liking. His impatience, as well as the creeping shadows in the valley below, reminded her that evening was near despite the clear sunshine higher up the mountainside. Reluctantly she mounted and, with many a glance backward at her house, rode down the trail.

Through an opening in the trees Beatrice caught a glimpse, as she descended, of the house beyond the stream. She could even see a man ride up to the door and a girl come running out to greet him. Then a drop in the trail hid both house and people abruptly from her view.

The warm sun seemed to be left completely behind as she and Buck pressed onward with all possible haste. Something new caught her curious attention in a moment, however,

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

and made her stop again. To the right of the pathway, in a little clearing among the pines, she had spied the glow of a tiny fire.

“Who is burning brush on my land?” she questioned inwardly, with a throb of pride at the thought of her proprietorship.

Guiding her horse among the trees, she rode a little nearer to investigate. The blaze was kindled skilfully between two stones, evidently by the hands of some one who knew the dangers of careless camp-fires in a pine grove. Bending over the crackling flame was a woman, with a yellow handkerchief covering her hair and a green shawl slanting about her hips above a shabby skirt. A big basket stood beside her, showing that she had been gathering berries in the wood, while an appetizing smell rising from the fire told of a supper of bacon and fresh trout. The smoke was in her eyes and she was, moreover, intent on balancing the frying-pan between the stones, so that she did not see Beatrice. For this the

GRAY CLOUD MOUNTAIN

girl was thankful, since, after a glance at the other's broad, brown face, she concluded that one ill-mannered foreigner was all she wished to encounter that day and that she would push her investigations no further. She turned her pony to make for the path again, but a rolling stone, dislodged by Buck's foot, attracted the woman's attention. Beatrice looked back to see that the stranger had abandoned her cooking and was standing erect, staring intently after them.

"At least she cannot follow," thought the girl with some relief; then observed, with a sinking of the heart, that the woman had turned abruptly and was hurrying down the hill through the underbrush. It was plain that she intended to reach the road first and intercept the horse and rider at the bridge.

CHAPTER II

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

THE yellow pony, stamping and sidling, came to an unwilling stop before the sturdy figure that blocked the way. Beatrice began to see that the red firelight had made the woman seem unduly terrifying and that her face, while it was sunburnt almost to the color of leather, was merely a square, stolid one, with keen, blue eyes and heavy, fair hair showing under the picturesque head handkerchief. With one hard, big hand, the stranger was feeling within her dress and, as Beatrice came close, she held up a letter.

“I saw you in town yesterday, and you looked kind. I want you to read my letter to me; I cannot read English myself. My

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

name is Christina Jensen. The letter is from my boy."

She spoke with a strong accent that, while it was somewhat like that of the man from whom Beatrice had asked the way, was not unpleasant, for her voice was rich and clear. The girl thought as she looked into the upturned face, that she had never seen such eager, appealing eyes.

"You can't read?" Beatrice exclaimed, forgetting politeness in her surprise.

"My own language, Finnish, yes, but not yours. My boy, Olaf, made me learn to talk English plain, but I was always so busy with my two hands I could not learn to read or write. Read, read, please, before it is too dark to see the letter."

Beatrice spread out the paper on the pommel of the saddle.

"Why," she said, glancing at the date, "it is nearly a year old!"

"Yes," returned the woman nodding heavily,

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"ten months ago he wrote it from his ship in Marseilles. I have nearly worn it out carrying it around and having it read to me. But it is only kind people I ask to read it now, for some begin to say, 'Like father, like son; your Olaf will never come back.'"

"Was his father a sailor too?" the girl asked.

"Yes, but he sailed away from our home in Finland when our boy was only a month old, and I never heard from him again. It was nearly a year later that we learned how his ship had been wrecked on the voyage to Japan. I brought my boy to this country then where I could support him better, and what a credit and a comfort to me he was. He was wild to go in the navy when the war began, but he was just too young; so it was not till last year that he slipped away, as I had always feared he would. He hardly even said good-by to me, and this is my only letter from him. But I talk too long; you will not be able to see."

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

Once more Beatrice turned to the paper and began:

“My dear mother: I expect you think I am never going to send you a letter—”

She read through to the end, thinking that it sounded affectionate but contained little news beyond the fact that the writer was going to China.

“He gives an address to send an answer,” she observed as she folded the letter and handed it back. “What did you write to him?”

To her surprise she saw big tears stand suddenly in Christina’s eyes.

“Ah, Thorvik would not let me, and I could n’t write myself,” she said. “And my Olaf is such an American, he cannot read my language. That is perhaps why he has not written again and has not come home.”

Then, seeing Beatrice’s puzzled look, she explained more fully, although it was difficult to make plain her foreign notion that women are subject to the men in their houses.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"Thorvik is my brother, once a good Finn like myself, but now—oh, so different. He was to come to America some years ago, but he war broke out over here and he went, instead into the Russian army. Now that there is peace he has come to us, but how that time had changed him! He is full of wild talk of revolution, and tyrants and destroying everything. He and Olaf never agreed. It was what made my boy unhappy at home, and, though I did what I could, Olaf went away from us at last."

Beatrice leaned forward in her saddle with sudden interest.

"Do you live in a little cottage half-way up the hill above Ely? That man I saw there when I rode by—is that your brother?"

Christina nodded.

"And if you could write to your son," the girl pursued, "what would you say?"

"I would say, 'Come home,' " cried Christina. "Over and over I would say, 'Come

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

home. If it is only for a week or a day between voyages,' I would say, 'come still, no matter what happened before you went away.' ”

Beatrice felt in the pocket of her riding skirt. There were a note-book and pencil there, she felt sure, for she had made a list of supplies to be bought in the village before she set out on her ride.

“Do you want me to put down the address and write to your son for you?” she offered.

“Oh, if you would!” cried Christina. “And you would never tell Thorvik?”

“There is no danger of that,” Beatrice assured her. “And I think somehow that your boy will come back.”

She could not tell, herself, what made her offer such a definite opinion.

There was something she liked about the words of the letter. “I went ashore at Marseilles, and it is such a strange place that before I had been there an hour I wanted to

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

stay a year. But loafing does n't suit me, so I am off again for Hong-Kong, but I'll not forget you, Mother, not even on the other side of the world."

She folded the worn page once again, gave it to Christina, and rode on. To her own surprise, she had that pleasant, satisfied feeling, that comes with the making of a new friend. After a few rods, she turned to look back and saw the Finnish woman still looking after her. Beatrice raised her hand in a quick gesture of leave-taking. It was a slight move but it had important consequences, since it seemed to cement their regard for each other and to strengthen Christina in a wavering resolution. She came swiftly down the road, calling in her clear, full voice:

"Stop, I must tell you something."

When she came to Buck's side she began with quick questioning that would have sounded impertinent, had it not been so earnest.

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

“Why did you come here, to Ely? How long are you going to stay?”

Briefly Beatrice explained about her aunt's health and the arrangements her father had made.

“I believe Aunt Anna wanted to come because she had been here once before,” she concluded rather vaguely. “I don't seem to remember if she told me when or why she came.”

“The place has changed since she was here, even since your father was here.” Christina declared. “There is a whole army of foreign laborers, Slavs, Poles, what the men call Bohunks, working on this irrigation project to water the valley. There is a strike brewing. Ah, do I not know? My brother Thorvik talks of nothing else. It is he who urges them on. When such a thing breaks out, Ely will not be a good place for you and your aunt and your sister.”

“But strikes mean just parades and people carrying banners and talking on street-corn-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

ers," Beatrice protested. She had seen industrial unrest at home and had thought very little of it. What she did fear was the long journey which had been so difficult for her aunt and which it seemed impossible to face soon again.

"Strikes are not the same in the West. Men carry something besides banners in the parades, and talking on street-corners ends in fights. You had better take your aunt away."

"It does not seem possible," Beatrice replied, "but thank you for telling me." Again she said good-by and rode on, feeling only a little uneasy, for, she reflected, "To live with a man like that brother would make any one think that things were going wrong."

There were lamps showing in some of the windows of the village, as she rode clattering up the street, and streaks of light dropping through the rickety shutters of a big, ramshackle building in the center of the town. A

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

stream of men was moving up the steps of this place, which seemed, as its door swung open, to be a public meeting hall. Its benches were crowded with rough-looking men, and someone on a platform at the far end was addressing the close-packed audience. She turned Buck loose at her own door to find his way home, as she had been instructed by Dan O'Leary. Then, tired, stiff, and with much to tell, she hurried into the house.

Dinner that night, in the candle-lit dining-room with the noiseless Chinaman serving them delicious food, was very welcome to the hungry Beatrice. Aunt Anna, looking very frail and weary, but still able to sit up in her cushioned chair, was at the head of the table, with one tall chestnut-haired niece at her right and with the other, the younger one, the pink and plump Nancy who was always laughing and nearly always asking questions, sitting at her left.

"Joe Ling is a good cook," observed Bea-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

trice with satisfaction, when their white-jacketed chef had gone into the kitchen for the dessert.

“Yes, but he would n’t let me come into the kitchen to get Aunt Anna a glass of milk; and when I told him about the broth she needed, I could n’t make out whether he heard or not, for he paid no attention at all. I don’t think I understand Chinamen. Their faces don’t change, you can’t tell what they are thinking about, and they look as though they knew everything in the world.”

Nancy sighed as she spoke, for she had undertaken the housekeeping, since she had more domestic tastes than her sister. The new and strange difficulties in this establishment in Ely were, however, sometimes rather appalling.

Aunt Anna said very little; she seemed to have small appetite and to be too tired to talk. After dinner Nancy went out to give orders for breakfast, but she came in again

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

looking much discouraged. It seemed impossible for her to get used to Joe Ling with his mask-like face and silent Oriental manners.

The next day Nancy was to try the new horse; but she was not so good a rider as Beatrice, and the astute Buck, guessing that fact at once, took liberties with her that she did not enjoy. She gave her sister a lively account of her misadventures in the evening when they were going to bed.

"I wanted to ride up to your cabin, but Buck had other plans. I saw most of the town and part of this end of the valley and then the pony decided to take me home. Some workmen, coming in from the place where they are digging that big ditch, scowled and stared at me and I did n't like it. I sometimes wonder a little why Aunt Anna wanted to come here."

"Who was with her when she was here long ago?" Beatrice asked. "It seems to me that

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

I heard her talking of it to dad, and that she said something about her—her brother.”

“Her brother—why, she has n’t any but our father,” objected Nancy. “If she had one he would be our uncle, and we would know him. It could n’t be!”

Beatrice was thinking so deeply that she paused in brushing her hair.

“It does seem as though I remembered about some such person, oh, a very long time ago when we were little. It was some one younger than father or Aunt Anna, with yellow hair like hers. He used to come up to the nursery to play with us, and then all of a sudden he did n’t come any more and no one talked about him, so I just forgot.”

“It is very puzzling,” returned Nancy. “Perhaps we might write home about it, but it would never do to worry Aunt Anna with asking her. Meanwhile we will sleep on it, for it is time to go to bed.”

Sleeping on it, however, was the one thing

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

that they did not do. Nancy had put out the light and was putting up the curtains when she aroused her drowsy sister with a sudden cry:

“O, Beatrice, come here and look.”

They stood together at the open window, startled and terrified by what they saw. The big hall in the next block was plainly visible, with its shutters down and its door wide open, as though the air within had become close and stifling beyond endurance. The place was still packed with men, but no orderly company now. They were all standing, some of them had climbed upon the benches, and every one seemed to be shouting at once. In the depths of the building, almost beyond where they could see, somebody was waving a red flag. Presently a group of men came rushing down the steps, then more and more, until the street was filled with an irregular, shouting throng, waving hats, bandannas, and banners and shrieking together, so many of

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

them in foreign tongues that it was impossible to guess what they said.

"It is the strike," Nancy gasped. "Christina did not tell you it would begin so soon or be so—so terrible."

"That man walking at the head of them all is her brother Thorvik," said Beatrice. "I wonder where they are going and what they mean to do."

They lingered at the open window until Nancy, sniffing suddenly, declared, "I smell smoke."

Before Beatrice could answer, they heard in the next room the voice of Aunt Anna, who had been awakened by the uproar.

"It is just a public meeting breaking up," Beatrice reassured her, although the sharp smell of burning wood began to fill the room as the blue smoke drifted in at the window. The girls were about to go on with some explanation when Nancy caught her sister's arm and, by a sign, made her look out.

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

The side door, just below them, was opening and closing silently, to allow the passing of a stealthy figure. Joe Ling, with a pole balanced over his shoulder and at either end of it a heavy basket, was slipping away into the dark with that short-stepping trot of a hurried Chinaman. He had brought those same baskets, containing all his worldly possessions, to their house three days before. It was plain that he not only considered his term of employment with them at an end but that he was about to shake the dust of Ely from his silent, Chinese-slippered feet.

“And ought n’t we to go too?” Beatrice wondered desperately.

She looked at Aunt Anna, thin, weak, and exhausted, lying on the bed. She heard outside the crash of falling timbers and a great shout as a shower of red sparks went sailing past the window. A moment later there came a violent knocking at the door.

Was it Christina she wondered as she ran

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

down the stairs, or had some of those shouting men——?

She called softly before she dared draw the bolt, and was relieved to hear the sound of a woman's voice. Christina stood on the threshold, and with her Dan O'Leary's helper at the livery-stable, Sam.

"Things have broken loose quicker than we thought," the woman began quickly, since there was no need for explanations with that red flare lighting up the whole village. "The men are burning the empty warehouse, just to show what devilment is in them. With this wind the whole town may catch and they don't care. You and your aunt must get away as quickly as you can. There is a train goes through in less than half an hour, so you must hurry. We could n't find Dan, but Sam here has hitched up and will take you down."

"We will go at once," Beatrice agreed, beginning to gather up their possessions in the living-room and to make ready for a hasty

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

packing. In the midst of her wild preparations, however, there was a step on the stair and Aunt Anna came slowly down, looking very white and frightened.

"What is all this? What are you doing?" she questioned and, from the combined explanations of Christina, Sam, and her nieces, all given at once, she seemed somehow to divine what had happened.

"There are only twenty minutes now," Beatrice urged. "We must be quick." But Aunt Anna did not move.

"You may take the girls to the station," she said to Sam. "They can travel back alone, but I am not going."

"But you must," cried Beatrice desperately. "You will not be safe. You can never get well in a tumult like this."

Aunt Anna gave her a strange look.

"I did not come here to get well," she said. "I came for something very different. And I am not going back."

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

She swayed—caught at the railing, too faint and ill to argue further. Nancy ran to help her but she still struggled to make them understand. She sent Beatrice a desperate, imploring glance and strove to speak again, but no words would come.

“You must make her go,” insisted Christina. “Sam can lift her on the train. She will thank you in the end.”

Beatrice shook her head.

“I don’t understand at all why she wants to stay,” she said, “but stay she shall. There is only one other thing to do. We will go to the cabin up on the mountain. Sam, can you get the keys from Dan O’Leary’s house? The place has been used lately, and it is safe from this fire, at least. Nancy, pack Aunt Anna’s things and I will gather up the rest. We can’t start too soon.”

Half an hour later the rickety old carriage was groaning and lurching up the mountain road. No one said a word as they climbed

THE DEPARTURE OF JOE LING

steadily upward. Beatrice, looking back, saw the red flames still leaping madly, still heard, though faintly, the shouts of the men as they ran here and there to bring fresh fuel to the fire. The responsibility of choice had in the end rested upon her; it would be her part to make life in the mountain cabin possible. Could she do it? Had she chosen well? They came into the shadow of the forest, and, in the stillness, following the uproar below, they heard the weird yapping of a coyote somewhere in the hills.

CHAPTER III

NEIGHBORS

“**D**O you remember,” said Nancy, as she and Beatrice viewed each other across a wilderness of overflowing trunks, half-unpacked boxes of bedding, baskets of china, and packages of groceries, “do you remember how that Englishman at your sorority dance used to talk about an affair like this as ‘settling in’? Settling would n’t be so hard, but settling in! Will all this stuff ever go inside this house?”

“I don’t know,” replied Beatrice abstractedly. “It will have to go in somehow. Surely we need everything that is here.”

She spoke absently, for the mention of the dance had brought a sudden flood of memories and of odd fancies. It had been the last one

NEIGHBORS

she had attended before the doctor's verdict concerning Aunt Anna's health, which had upset all their plans and driven them West. It must have been in another world, she thought, that evening at the country club with the moonlight coming in on the polished floor, with the whirling maze of colored dresses, the swinging music, and the soft sound of multitudes of sliding feet. She stepped out upon the stone doorstep, and looked down between the giant red trunks of the pine-trees down upon the white thread of road winding to the valley, upon the huddle of box-like houses, with the slow smoke rising from the blackened ruins in the midst.

A wave of panic seized her. Would she know how to manage affairs in this strange new world, this place of rugged, lonely peaks, pine-forested mountainsides, of narrow valleys filled with rioting men? Yet panic was followed by sudden exhilaration, born, perhaps, of the strange clearness of the thin air

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

and the brilliance of the morning sunshine. She remembered the dance again, how she had been manager of it and how the evening had been full of congratulations on the success of her arrangements. Yet in the midst of it she had felt a vague discontent, a sudden wonder whether this was all the pleasure that life had to offer. Well, she thought now, with a long breath of fresh, sparkling air, if she could hold her own in that world, she could in this also, and she returned to her work.

Nancy, quite untroubled by any doubts or fancies, was plodding steadily ahead at the task in hand. It had been no hardship for her to arise early, explore the possibilities of the kitchen, concoct a breakfast out of such supplies as they had brought with them, and carry it in on a tray with a beaming and triumphant smile.

Aunt Anna seemed to have suffered little harm from the midnight flitting, and was sleep-

NEIGHBORS

ing late after the excitements of the night before. She had been made comfortable at once in the one room that was in tolerable order; for the girls had only to make up the couch with the bedding they had brought, to build a fire out of the pine cones that lay so thickly under the trees, and the apartment was ready for the invalid. Christina had taken charge of the place for the former occupants, and had left it very clean and in order. In the dry Montana air, no house, even when closed for months, grows damp, nor, in the clean pine woods, even very dusty. Aunt Anna had remained long awake, however; for, two hours later when it was almost dawn, Beatrice had stolen in and found her staring wide-eyed at the fire.

“Can I do anything for you? Are n’t you very tired?” the girl had asked, but her aunt only smiled and shook her head.

“I am very comfortable,” she said. “I think

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

we are going to be very happy in this strange little house. I am glad you had the courage to bring me here, my child."

Beatrice stood beside the bed and straightened the coverlid.

"Won't you tell me why you wanted so much to stay?" she begged. "I wish I might know."

Her aunt did not answer for a moment.

"I used to think," she said at last, that you might never know, but perhaps, since last night, I have changed my mind. Yes, whatever happens, I believe I will tell you, but not just now; for I am too weary to go through with such a thing. Move my pillow a little, my dear; I am going to sleep. The music of that waterfall would make anybody drowsy."

Before they had finished breakfast, Christina had appeared, with Sam, heavy-laden, following her, bringing more of their things from the village.

"I just packed everything that I thought you would need and had Sam fetch it up," said

NEIGHBORS

Christina. "No, you can't go down to the town until things have quieted a little. There was fighting last night, and Dan O'Leary has been shot."

"Just through the leg," Sam reassured them, seeing Nancy's horrified face. "Dan has been foreman of one of the ditching gangs, but he owns the livery-stable and one of the stores, so being a property holder makes him more careful than the rest. He's hot-headed enough, though, and was leader of all the workmen until this fellow out of Russia, Thorvik, came to town. He goes Dan one better, and there is no knowing what he won't stir up."

"Is the strike going to last long?" Beatrice asked.

Sam chuckled.

"It's not a strike; that's just where the pinch is. While they were holding their meeting last night, and arguing about how soon they should quit, there comes word from the company that the work is shut down until

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

further notice. Something has gone wrong with the money end of the business, people say, and there's nothing to go on with. Anyway, there's no strike; the men higher up beat them to it. Christina is right. The City of Ely is no place for young ladies to be going just now."

He carried in the boxes and went down the path for more.

"There's room in the shed for your horse, Miss Beatrice," he announced, when he had made his last trip. "I can bring him up if you like, only you would have to take care of him yourself. We can haul up enough feed to keep him, and there's some grazing land higher up the hill."

Accordingly it was settled that Buck, also, was to be a part of their establishment, although Beatrice felt a little appalled at the prospect of taking care of a horse single-handed.

"Bless you, he's that wise he can almost take

NEIGHBORS

care of himself," Sam reassured her. "He's a little light on his feet when you go to saddle him, but beyond that he has n't a fault. It will be a good thing to have a horse on the place."

Toward noon the two girls, with Christina's assistance, began to bring some order out of the confusion. The cabin possessed four rooms downstairs; the large living-room, into which the front door opened; the bedroom off it; the lean-to kitchen; and, wonder of wonders, a tiny bath-room with a shining white porcelain tub.

"Those engineers who used the place just settled down to make themselves comfortable," Christina explained. "They put in the water-pipes themselves, and I'll never forget the day they brought up that tub, packed on a mule. He bucked it off once and it slid down the hill until it caught between two pine-trees."

The enterprising former tenants had also introduced electricity from the power plant of

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the nearest mine, so that the two most difficult housekeeping problems of water and light were thus already solved. The heavy table and straight clumsy chairs must also have been brought there by their predecessors, and the bunks in the two little rooms under the roof must have been their work. The men had evidently slept on pine branches; but for the girls Sam brought mattresses from the house in the village and a comfortable bed for Aunt Anna.

"Now," said Nancy at last, "we have everything we need except milk and eggs."

"I believe," said Christina, who was scrubbing the big table, "that over at John Herrick's—he's your nearest neighbor—they could spare you what milk and eggs you want. I know they have a cow and that his girl, Hester, makes a great deal of her chickens!"

Neighbors! Beatrice had forgotten that house, nearly hidden by the shoulder of the mountain, but visible from the trail below.

NEIGHBORS

There was a girl there, too, perhaps of their own age. She was eager to go and investigate at once and scarcely waited to hear how to find the way.

It was a long walk down to the road beyond the bars and then up the hill to the next house. Beatrice realized, as she tramped along, that distances are deceitful in high altitudes and that the presence of Buck would be a great convenience. The house, when she reached it, was even larger than she had thought—a long, low dwelling, with a row of sheds and stables and an enclosed corral! She had just reached the front steps when she saw the door fly open and a brown-haired girl, with very bright, dancing eyes, come running out in a flutter of dark curls and flying blue and white skirts.

“Oh, oh!” cried Hester Herrick, grasping Beatrice’s hand in her cordial brown one. “I thought there was smoke in your chimney and I could n’t wait to know who was living in the cabin. To have neighbors—you can’t think

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

what it means on this mountain! Come in, come in."

To Beatrice, who had observed with some distaste the flimsy houses of the village, the sagging board walks and streets full of ruts and boulders, this place was a delightful surprise, with its air of spruce neatness and picturesque charm. She liked the outside of the building, the pointed gables and wide eaves; but, as Hester conducted her within, she gave a little gasp of wonder, for the house was really beautiful inside. Beauty in a house, to her, had always meant shining white woodwork, softly colored rugs, and polished mahogany, but there was nothing of all that here. The low room with its windows opening toward the distant mountains, was full of rich colors, the dull red of the unceiled pine walls and bookcases, the odd browns and yellows in the bearskin rugs, the clear flame-color of the bowl of wild lilies that stood on the broad window-sill. Hester

NEIGHBORS

seated her guest in the corner of a huge comfortable couch and sat down beside her with a smile of broad satisfaction.

It was difficult to bring up such a prosaic subject as milk and eggs in such pleasant surroundings; but when that had been disposed of, the two were soon chattering as though they had known each other for years.

"Yes," commented Hester, nodding sagely, as she heard the tale of their departure for the cabin on the hill, "there is going to be real trouble in Ely, so Roddy says, and he won't let me go down there just now. How glad I am that you did n't go away!"

Beatrice's eyes had been roving about the room, observing the white birch log on the hearth, the tawny-orange shade of the homespun curtains, and even the pictures on the wall.

"Why," she exclaimed, her glance arrested by a photograph hanging near the window,

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"we have that same picture at home, in my father's study. It is of the school where he used to go."

Hester looked up at the vine-covered archway showing a tree-lined walk beyond.

"I don't know where Roddy got it," she said. "It has always been there, over his desk, for as long as I can remember."

"Who is Roddy, your brother?" Beatrice asked.

"No, he is my—my sort of father, but not really. He is too young to be my father, I suppose. He adopted me when I was very little. His name is John Rodman Herrick, so, as he's only fifteen years older, I call him Roddy. I can't remember when I didn't live in this house with him, and with old Julia and her husband Tim, to do the work for us. There is Roddy now."

The stride of heavy boots sounded along the veranda, and a man came in, a handsome vigorous person who, as Hester had said, looked too

NEIGHBORS

young to be her father. Nor were they the least alike in appearance, since he was very fair, with thick, light hair and blue eyes that contrasted oddly with his very sunburnt skin. He wore ordinary riding clothes, but seemed to carry an air of distinction in his clean-cut profile and straight shoulders.

He listened to Hester's rather confused account of Beatrice's arrival and shook hands with her gravely.

"Are you going to be comfortable in the cabin?" he asked. "Who is helping you get settled?"

"There is a Finnish woman who is doing everything for us," Beatrice told him. "I have never seen any one who worked so hard."

She told how she had first met Christina in the wood, and what gratitude and assistance the woman had given them later.

"Poor Christina, she can never put that boy out of her mind," John Herrick said. "He was a good fellow, Olaf Jensen, and I have

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

missed him since he left Ely. He was always in some mischief or other and his last escapade before he went to sea came near to being serious. There are still men in the village telling what they will do to him when he comes back."

"What was it he did?" Beatrice asked.

John Herrick began to laugh.

"Olaf was working with one of our ditching gangs, and a good workman he was. Suddenly, one day while they were digging near the river, Olaf pointed to a high rock opposite, called Mason's Bluff, a well-known and dangerous place. There seemed to be a man hanging by a rope halfway down the face of it, unable, apparently, to get either up or down. The laborers did n't take much interest—said any one was a fool who would try such a climb; and not one of them would budge an inch to help him. Then Olaf remarked casually, 'It must be that scientist fellow who was in our camp yesterday. Do you remember that rich tenderfoot who went around spending money

NEIGHBORS

and tapping rocks?' Every man dropped his tools, for if there is a chance for a reward these Bohunks are on the job at once. You should have seen them scurrying down to the river, getting across any way they could, and running like rabbits through the brush, each one determined to be first on the spot."

"And did they save him?" Beatrice inquired eagerly.

"The first ones were within a hundred yards when the man fell."

She gasped, but he went on with a dry chuckle.

"They went nearer to pick him up and found he was a dummy man, stuffed with straw. Then they remembered that Olaf had been laughing at them for being willing to do anything for money and nothing without it, and they came back to camp vowing to have his blood. Even I was surprised at what an ugly temper they showed, but Olaf was wise enough to know how they would feel, and when they

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

came back he was gone. Probably he meant to go anyway and wanted to have one final fling."

Beatrice, glancing at the clock, was horrified to see how long she had stayed and rose at once to go. Both her new friends came to the door with her.

"By the way," said John Herrick as Beatrice stood on the step below, "my Hester is too informal a person for introductions, and she has not even told me your name. Indeed, I doubt if she knows it herself. Won't you tell us who you are and who is at the cabin with you?"

What a cordial, friendly smile, he had, Beatrice thought, and how it lighted his brown face!

"My Aunt Anna and my sister Nancy are at the cottage with me," she said. "The place is mine; my father gave it to me. My name is Beatrice Deems."

Never had she seen a countenance change so

NEIGHBORS

abruptly as did John Herrick's as he turned suddenly and went into the house, leaving Hester to say her good-byes alone.

It was at the end of a very laborious but satisfactory day that Nancy came up to her sister's room to find Beatrice writing at the rough pine table.

"Everything is in order, and Christina and Sam have just gone," said Nancy. "There was n't anything more you wanted them to do, was there?"

"Oh, I wanted them to mail my letters," exclaimed Beatrice, seizing her envelopes and jumping up. "It took me so long to write everything to dad that I only just finished this one that I promised Christina for her boy, Olaf. Perhaps I can catch Sam at the gate."

She sped down the path through the pines and was able to overtake Christina and Sam where they had paused to put up the bars. Beatrice was just explaining to the Finnish woman what she had written, when a heavy

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

slouching figure came up the road through the shadows and Thorvik, in his broken English, addressed his sister roughly.

“You spend the whole day here—spend the night too? I have not yet my supper!”

It was evident that he wished Beatrice, also, to know of his displeasure, or he would have used his own tongue. He grasped Christina angrily by the arm and shot the girl a scowling glance of such fierce enmity that involuntarily she shrank back behind the gate. It was difficult, under that frowning scrutiny, to hand the two letters to Sam,—the more so since Christina eyed one of the envelopes with such nervous apprehension. Even a duller eye than Thorvik’s might have noted that the letter was of special importance to her.

The sullen animosity deepened on the man’s face.

“You make nothing more with my sister; see?” he said, as he led Christina away.

Sam nodded a subdued good night, clucked

NEIGHBORS

low-spiritedly to his horses, and drove slowly after the two. Even his unquenched cheerfulness seemed affected by instinctive dread of Thorvik's sour ill-temper. Nor was it with a very cheerful heart that Beatrice walked back alone up the path. It rendered her task of living by no means easier to realize that she had made an enemy of such a man as Thorvik. Yet the light from her cabin, shining small and yellow beneath the giant pines, seemed somehow to rekindle her failing courage. Those two dearly loved people were there within, Nancy and Aunt Anna. Surely the way would be shown to her to care for them and keep them safe.

CHAPTER IV

SHERLOCK HOLMES

IT was a week later and Beatrice, with a landscape of blue mountains and green forest showing beyond her through the open door, was standing on the threshold in her riding clothes.

"I have finished my share of the housework and I am off for a ride," she said to Nancy.

Her sister smiled broadly over her dusting.

"I would never have thought," she declared, "that you could curry a horse and split the kindling before breakfast and that I could scrub floors and wash dishes every day and that we both of us would like it. There must be something strange in this mountain air."

They had begun to feel as settled as though

SHERLOCK HOLMES

they had been at their housekeeping in the cabin for months. The cottage itself was a different place, an entrancingly pleasant and comfortable one. Hester Herrick, with whom they were now great friends, was always bringing them things—some big black andirons for the great fireplace, a collection of soft pine pillows, and the thick bearskin rug that lay before the hearth.

“Roddy said you were to have it. He shot the bear himself last winter,” she said when the girls protested that this last gift was too great a one.

Sam also had brought a bashfully presented offering, the pelt of a mountain lion which now served as Aunt Anna’s bedside rug. Nancy had put up white blue-bordered curtains at the little square windows and had set on the wide sills pots of red berries, boxes of ferns, and bowls of bright-faced pansies.

With the fresh wind fluttering the curtains and the sunshine lying in patches on the white

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

scrubbed floor, the little cabin was as gay and homelike a place as heart could desire.

Christina, in spite of Thorvik's interdiction, still came every day. This morning she arrived earlier than usual, with their marketing in a big basket and the mail; for it was not, even yet, a good thing for the girls to go often to the village. She took some letters in to their Aunt Anna and remained for some time, since Aunt Anna appeared to be asking her questions.

"No," the girls heard Christina say, through the door, "there is no one of your name hereabouts. But Olaf and I have only lived in this valley ten years, so it might have been before."

Beatrice looked up, startled. What had her aunt been asking and why should there be any one of their name living in this far-off place? She remembered her former wonder concerning that brother of whom they never heard anything at home. But Christina came out

SHERLOCK HOLMES

and closed the door, the bright morning was calling, and Beatrice forgot her curiosity in looking forward to her ride.

"Don't you want to go, Nancy?" she said as she went through the kitchen.

"No," returned Nancy briskly, "I don't care for riding as you do, and this morning I would not go for anything. Christina is going to teach me how to make bread." The exploration of strange forests and dizzy mountainsides was nothing to Nancy, compared with the excitement of cooking something new.

To saddle Buck was now a less difficult affair than at first, for his mistress had learned to fling the object of his hatred upon him and then stand back, giving adroit jerks at the cinch between his kicks and plunges. When he had got his fill of bucking he would turn his white face to her as if to say. "That is all for to-day; now let's be off."

Her expedition was doomed to delay, however, for, as she was leading her pony around

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the corner of the house, she came upon a visitor, a total stranger, standing on the doorstep. He was apparently annoyed at finding no doorbell and having his knock go unheard. He shuffled his feet, coughed, and rapped smartly on the door again and again, as though he were a person of such importance that he could not afford to be kept waiting. Beatrice realized suddenly how used she had become to Ely's conventional costume of flannel shirt and high boots, since this dapper newcomer, with his pointed shoes and tight, high-waisted coat looked not only uncomfortable, but absurd.

"Good morning, Miss Deems. Beautiful day, is it not?" began the stranger easily. "Mills is my name, Dabney Mills of the Brownsville, Montana 'Evening Star.' My paper has sent me here, or rather I volunteered to come, to investigate this unfortunate affair going on in Broken Bow Valley."

"Oh, you mean the strike?" Beatrice asked, rather bewildered and not knowing at all why

SHERLOCK HOLMES

the overdressed Mr. Mills should have sought out their remote cabin.

He made a movement as though to go in, but, since Beatrice seemed not at all inclined to open the door, he sat down on the step with smooth assurance, laid his hat on the stone, and took out a note-book.

"The affair is more like a lockout than a strike, but not exactly that, either," he continued with that irresistible fluency of speech adopted by people who talk a great deal to unwilling listeners. "As I understand it, the situation is this. The Broken Bow Irrigation Co. undertakes to construct the necessary dams, ditches, and sluice-gates to water this dry valley, a big project in which a certain John Herrick, resident of these parts, has large interests."

"I did not know about John Herrick's share in it," Beatrice said. She was beginning already to catch the Western habit of dropping the title "mister" except in direct address.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

Since she was unwilling that the stranger should come in, for fear he would disturb and annoy Aunt Anna, and since he made no move to go away, she finally sat down herself upon the step.

“The money for this affair,” Mills went on, “was raised in part, as is usual, by the owners of the land which is to be irrigated, but the greater amount was to be subscribed by capitalists outside the valley, John Herrick pledging himself to see that the necessary sum was forthcoming. So far, so good.” He tapped the note-book with a stubby forefinger and went on with significant emphasis. “Since there is no bank in Ely, there are often large sums in currency brought to pay the men and deposited in the Irrigation Company’s safe. It is known that, just before this outbreak, the finances of the company were in good condition and that there was no talk of funds giving out before the work was completed. Yet when the men held a meeting to debate whether

SHERLOCK HOLMES

they should go on or should strike for increased wages—they had already had one increase but Thorvik insisted it was not enough,—they were served with a notice that the capital was exhausted and that construction was shut down. That is what all the trouble is about.”

He looked at Beatrice very wisely, but she said nothing. She was aware of Nancy standing in the door and looking at Dabney Mills’ back in round-eyed astonishment. She called her sister out finally, and introduced the newcomer stiffly, and motioned Nancy to sit beside her.

“Yes, sir, the money was gone!” The polished manner of Mills’ narrative dropped suddenly into the colloquial, as though the effort had been too much for him. “The men mobbed the office building demanding to know what had happened, and the officers of the unions were allowed to examine the books and even to look into the safe, but it was plain to them all that the company could n’t turn up a red

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

cent. Been stolen, so people begin to say, but no one knows who did it. Now the men are lounging around town, idle, quarreling, looking for trouble. Not a wheel can turn until the money is found.”

Nancy looked at him with inquisitive interest.

“And did you come to Ely to find it?” she asked.

“Well—why, if you put it that way, I guess I did,” he answered, reddening a little, but seeming flattered, on the whole, by the bluntness of her question. “I told the editor of my paper that it would make a big story if any one could find out just who made way with that money. He did n’t think a cub reporter could do much, but I offered to come up here on my own responsibility and get to the bottom of the whole affair. It will be a smashing big hit for me if I make good.”

He opened his note-book and fluttered over the leaves.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

"Of course the sheriff is working on the job, but these country officials are no sleuths. It will take a smarter man than he is to get anywhere. I'm on my way up to interview John Herrick; he's the big man of the company and he ought to be able to give me something. But in case he won't talk I thought I would stop and learn what I could from his neighbors, I understand you know Miss Herrick well. Now anything you can tell me will be useful. What do you know of John Herrick or his habits or his business?"

He waited with pencil poised.

"We don't know anything, and we would n't tell you if we did," cried Nancy indignantly.

"It isn't hard usually to find out about people from their neighbors," Dabney Mills declared, quite unabashed. "You are staying with your aunt, I understand. Perhaps if I went in and spoke to her——"

"You will do nothing of the sort." Beatrice had found the voice of which astonishment and

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

anger had robbed her. "My aunt is not to be disturbed, and there is not the least use in asking us any more questions."

"Oh, well, of course, if you are going to take it like that——!" Dabney Mills rose and pocketed his note-book. He seemed quite unoffended and not convinced even yet that his quest was fruitless. "I'll drop in again in a day or two."

Beatrice walked with great dignity into the house, followed by Nancy, who could not help turning to look after the reporter as he trudged away through the pines, the cock of his hat and the swagger of his shoulders showing that he did not acknowledge defeat.

"I do hope Aunt Anna was n't disturbed," said Beatrice as she tiptoed into the inner room to discover her aunt propped up in the invalid chair and rocked by a gale of laughter.

"You did very well, my dears," Aunt Anna said. "Even his back is bristling with indigna-

SHERLOCK HOLMES

tion as he marches away. I could not help overhearing with the door open, and you were both well equal to the situation. What a strange, impertinent man, or boy rather, for he is scarcely grown up. I wonder that any reputable newspaper employs him!"

"He said he was doing this on his own responsibility and was going to sell the news to a paper later," explained Beatrice. "He thinks he is going to make some startling discovery."

"I believe," asserted Nancy wagging her head sagely, "that when he was young and his character was forming, his mother let him read too many detective stories and they didn't agree with him. He thinks he is Sherlock Holmes and Craig Kennedy and all the others rolled into one. That is what is the matter with him."

"You take a charitable view, Nancy," returned her aunt, "and I rather think your diag-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

nosis is right. But insistent, foolish people of his kind can often do a great deal of harm without intending it."

Beatrice returned finally to the impatient Buck and rode down the path toward the gate. It was her intention to explore some of the upper trails of the mountainside to-day, for she had no desire to ride in the direction of the village. Once only had she been forced to go to town and she had felt very uneasy under the sullen unfriendly stares of the idle foreigners lounging about the doorways or sitting in rows at the edge of the board sidewalks.

She was to be delayed once more, however, by another visitor, one even more unwelcome than the first. She had dismounted to give a final jerk to the cinch of the girth and was about to swing into the saddle again to ride through the gate when she saw Thorvik come striding across the lowered bars. His face was red with the heat of his steep climb and the veins stood out on his forehead below his

SHERLOCK HOLMES

bristling tow-colored hair. Such a face she had never seen before, distorted with anger and flushed with evil hate. He pulled a letter from his pocket as he came near and held it up. Thinking that it was for her she stretched out her hand to take it, but he snatched it back beyond her reach.

"You are to look, not to have it," he said in a voice thick with rage.

She saw it was addressed in a plain, school-boy hand to "Mrs. Christina Jensen, Ely, Montana."

"Why," she cried, "it must be from——"

"From that Olaf," snarled Thorvik, "and why should he be writing, if not because he has had an answer to his letter of long ago. I told her there should be no answer. Who wrote for her?"

"I did," returned Beatrice steadily, although her hot temper was beginning to rise within her.

She made a move to remount her horse, but

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the man stepped forward and seized the bridle. Buck, nervous and startled, wheeled and reared, but could not jerk free from the iron grip on his bit. Thorvik moved up the path and put himself between Beatrice and the house. Terror as well as anger was beginning to take possession of her, but she faced him without flinching.

“You wrote it—after I forbid?” His voice shook with fury. “Then this is what I do with the answer.” He slipped the rein over his arm and with his great hard hands tore the letter into shreds that went whirling and scattering in the wind all across the side of the hill.

“Had Christina read it?” cried Beatrice in dismay.

“No, Christina cannot read, nor I. She is crying at home. I told her I would bring the letter to you and tear it up before your face, to show you how much use is it to meddle with the business of other people.”

“And she will never know what he said?”

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Beatrice exclaimed. "You took it from her before she could hear? You coward—you _____"

"Steady, my dear."

A man's quiet voice sounded at her elbow, and she turned suddenly to see John Herrick.

"Anger won't get you anywhere with people of this fellow's kind," he said gently. "If you wish to order a man off your grounds, you must do it quietly."

So, standing firm on the path, fortified by the knowledge that John Herrick was beside her, Beatrice had the strange delight of directing an impertinent intruder to drop her horse's rein and leave her premises, and of seeing him obey. For Thorvik went. He blustered, stammered, then finally relinquished Buck's bridle and marched away to the gate. He stopped before he passed through to hurl a defiance over his shoulder, but he hastened on immediately after.

"His threats grow louder the further

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

away he goes," commented John Herrick.

"I—I am glad you came," observed Beatrice a little shakily. The incident had been an unpleasant one, nor could she guess what the result would have been had not help appeared from such an unexpected quarter.

"I am glad also," he returned gravely. "A strange creature who called himself a reporter stopped me at my door as I was starting for the village. He asked me a great many impudent questions, but he happened to mention that he had seen Thorvik going in through your gate. At that, I rode off at once, leaving him with his mouth and his notebook both still open. Here comes our journalistic friend now. He seems to find this morning sun a trifle uncomfortable."

Very hot and wilted did Dabney Mills look as he came trudging down the path, his handkerchief stuck into his over-tall but exceedingly limp white collar. Yet his inquiring spirit still seemed undismayed. He stopped where John

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Herrick's nervous black pony was tied, peered over the fence, and poised his pencil once more above a page.

"Won't you just tell me——" he began.

"I have told you already," said John Herrick, "that I have nothing to say. When the men get rid of their leader and come to me willing to work again, we will inquire into this matter of the company's finances. But while they are not in our employ, the company's money is none of their business. Until Thorvik leaves Ely and the laborers stop talking of strikes, things shall stand exactly as they are."

His tone was so final that even Dabney Mills realized that this was the end of the interview and walked on unwillingly in the direction Thorvik had gone. John Herrick caught Buck, gave the rein to Beatrice, and went to untie his own horse, but hesitated a moment before mounting. His manner assumed suddenly a stiff shyness quite unlike his cordiality of a moment before.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"There is one thing more," he began. "I have been away for some days, but I now understand from Hester that your aunt, who is with you, has been ill. Is that true?"

"Yes," assented Beatrice. She was puzzled by his change of manner, but she still felt that his kindness invited confidence, and she told him fully of the state of Aunt Anna's health and how concerned they were about her.

"I wanted to suggest," John Herrick went on slowly, "that there is a doctor who lives on the other side of Gray Cloud Mountain, a man who does not practise now, but who has been a famous specialist for just such illness. He could help your aunt, I know. He would come to see her if I asked him, for he has always been a good friend to me. Would you care to consult him?"

"Oh, indeed I would. How kind of you, how wonderfully good to have thought of it!" exclaimed Beatrice. She had seen the regular

SHERLOCK HOLMES

doctor of Broken Bow Valley and had not felt that he could help them very greatly.

“Oh, it is nothing,” John Herrick returned, apparently somewhat disturbed by the eagerness of her gratitude. “It is just friendly interest in a neighbor.” He went on speaking in a tone of rather careful indifference. “Dr. Minturn and his wife are very fond of my Hester, and she often rides over to visit them. It takes a whole day to go there and another to come back, but I believe she would like to take the ride with you. She was saying something yesterday about going soon to see them. I would fetch the doctor myself, but I cannot leave Ely to-day. As he does not often ride to town for his mail and there is no telephone line, he is rather difficult to reach. If you wish to wait for a day or two, I will gladly go to fetch him.”

“Oh, no,” replied Beatrice. “I will go to-day if Hester is willing. I feel as though I

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

could not wait. And how can I ever thank you for—for everything?”

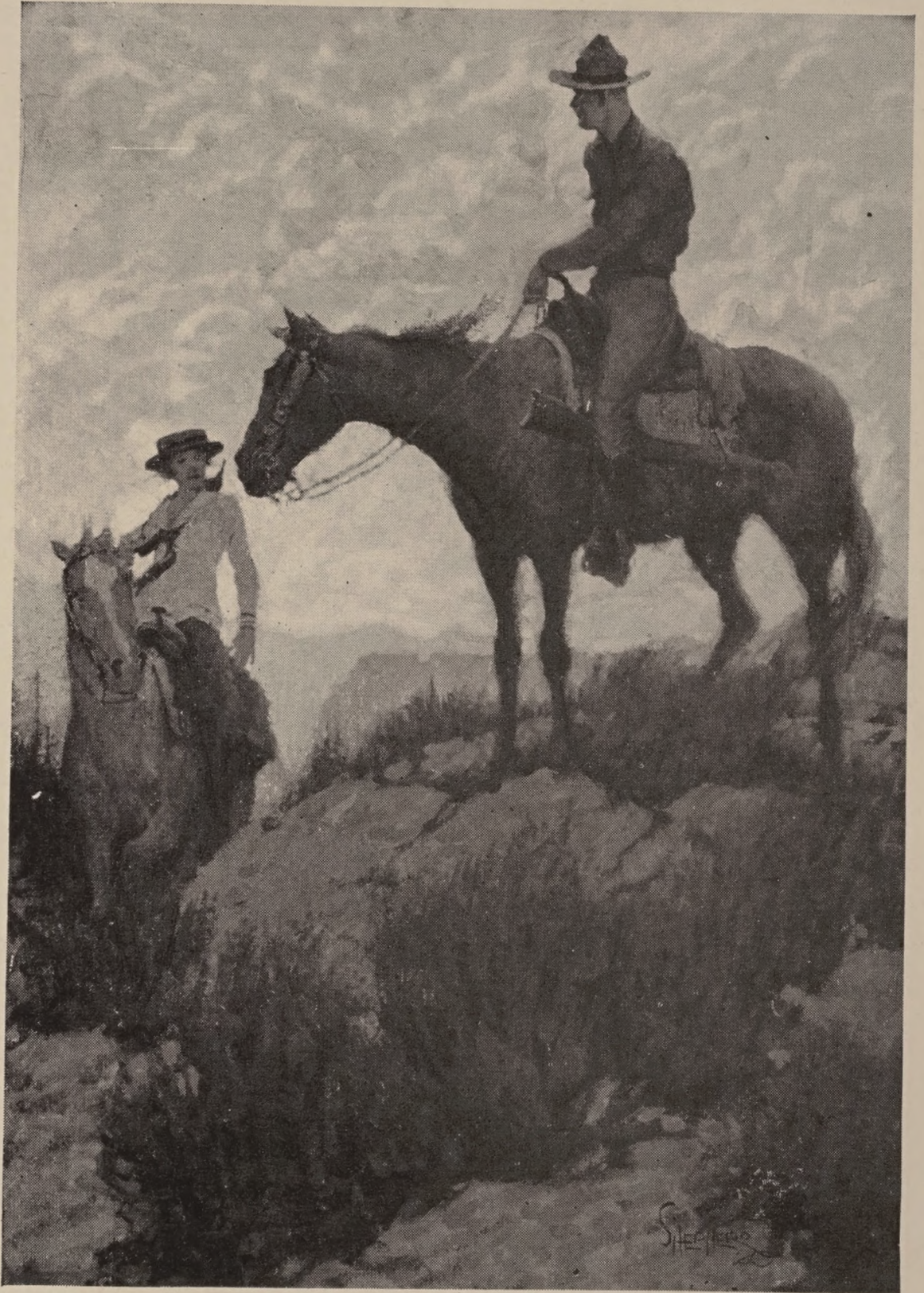
There was a curious wistfulness in the look that John Herrick bent upon her, and a great kindness also.

“You have taken up rather a large task,” he said slowly; “taken it for the most part upon your own shoulders. I want you to know that, as far as it is in my power, I am going to help you make a success of it.”

His shyness had dropped as suddenly as it had come upon him and there was nothing but the warmest friendliness in his smile as he swung into the saddle.

By a touch upon the bridle, Beatrice turned Buck's head toward the house, then paused and looked back at John Herrick. She saw that he had not moved but was sitting his horse staring after her. Upon sudden impulse she wheeled her pony and rode up to him.

“You are taking a great deal of trouble for—for strangers,” she said, looking him very



"It is you who do not understand," he returned gravely

SHERLOCK HOLMES

steadily in the eyes. "I don't think I can ever make you understand how grateful I am."

"It is you who do not understand," he returned gravely, "I——"

Whether his impatient black horse would no longer wait or whether he broke off what he was saying by a jerk of the rein, Beatrice could not tell. His pony plunged, turned, and went galloping away down the road, leaving her and Buck to set their faces once more toward the cabin.

It did not take her many minutes to explain matters to Nancy and Aunt Anna, to gather up what she would need for the journey, and to bid them an excited good-by.

"Of *course* it is all right for me to go," she assured her aunt in reply to some faint protest. "Hester goes often and she will be there to show me the way."

She was away down the path as fast as Buck's nimble feet would take her. When

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

she rode up to the door of the next house, Hester was not immediately visible, but she appeared presently from the kitchen. With a troubled face she listened to the plan of their going across the mountain together.

"I wish I could go," she said, "but old Julia has one of her attacks of rheumatism and I know I should not leave her. Won't you wait a few days until I can go or Roddy can ride over for us?"

Beatrice, impatient and disappointed, sat silent in her saddle, thinking deeply. She looked down into the long, sun-flooded valley, then up at the sharp slopes above and the white, winding trail, calling her to the adventure.

"Why shouldn't I go alone?" she asked boldly. "Where you can go, surely Buck and I can go also."

Hester looked doubtful.

"The way is clear enough," she said, "and

SHERLOCK HOLMES

not very hard going, but you have never ridden over it."

Beatrice would listen to no objections. By the weight of her two years' seniority and her natural determination, she speedily overcame all of Hester's misgivings. She made her friend give her full directions, which she felt would be easy to follow.

"I am to keep to the line of the stream as far as its head waters and then go up through a cleft between two rocks at the very top of the pass," she repeated. "You say the trail is fairly plain all the way? Certainly I can follow it."

"One of the men said something about some rocks that had fallen at the very head of the stream, and you may have to go around them," Hester said. "Otherwise it is all plain. Be careful on the slopes of loose stone and don't leave the trail."

"I will be careful," returned Beatrice. "O Hester, what a ride it is going to be!"

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

There was not a mile of the way that disappointed her. Up and up they went, through forest, across clearings, fording the noisy shallows of the stream that was their guide, scrambling across the faces of rocky slopes where Buck picked his way as warily as a cat. She ate her lunch beside the stream, drank of the ice-cold water and rode on.

"We must be nearly to the pass," she thought at last, and stopped to look back. Broken Bow Valley had shrunk to a mere creek-bed, one among many watercourses winding beneath. The heavy, dark forest seemed to cling, like a blanket, to the lower slopes of the mountains, as though it had slipped away from the smooth rocky shoulders of the heights above. Gray Cloud Pass was not a very high one, but to her inexperienced eyes, the depths below her were almost enough to make her dizzy. A cold wind blew down from the ice-fields so that she huddled herself

SHERLOCK HOLMES

into the grateful warmth of her sheepskin coat.

Higher still they mounted until they came, as Hester had foretold, to an impassable mass of rock that had fallen across the trail. The *détour* was difficult, up a barren slope covered with stunted bushes, and out on a naked spur whence she could look away at peak beyond peak, some bleak and dark, some shining with never-melting snow. Such tiny specks of creatures as she and Buck were, crawling like flies over the rocky hillside!

“Don’t leave the trail.” So Hester had warned, but there could be no harm in climbing a little higher, since she could see so plainly where her pathway began again and wound crookedly to the narrow passage between two huge boulders where she and Buck must go through. Above her, caught in a cleft in the great shoulder of the mountain, was a still, dark lake, its waters held in this

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

cup of the rocks and fed by the melting snows of the ice-fields far above. She felt that she must see it closer and urged her pony forward.

It was as still as a polished mirror, deep-blue and fringed by a dark circle of pines. While she stood, staring fascinated at the gleaming surface, a deer came down to drink, swam leisurely across the far end of the lake, and disappeared into the forest. The motion seemed to break her dream, for she turned quickly in the saddle and looked down. She had climbed above the very summit of the pass, for she could see where the trail dipped downhill again, disappearing in a mass of trees. It even seemed that she could discern a cottage below and a wide, open slope of hillside. She could also see, however, that the sun was perilously near the line of the mountain tops and that the day was coming to an end.

"We must hurry," she thought quickly. "I believe this is the best way down."

Buck moved forward, hesitated, felt for his

SHERLOCK HOLMES

footing, and hesitated again. An ominous sound came to her ears, the rattling of sliding stones. The horse slipped, went forward several yards apparently with no will of his own, then stopped and turned his white face to look around at her. She dismounted to lead him, but felt the loose shale give way under her feet. Frantically she caught at the pommel of Buck's saddle, but in a moment they were both slipping together while the rattle of the stones increased into a roar.

"Buck," she cried aloud, "what have I done!"

The whole mountain seemed to be moving under her feet; she knew dimly that the saddle horn was snatched from her grasp, just before she plunged forward into darkness.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

WHEN Beatrice opened her eyes, a soft, insistent nose was passing over her face and hands and breathing warmly against her cheek. She sat up, holding her whirling head, to discover that Buck was standing over her, apparently puzzled and distressed at the mishap to his mistress. It seemed strange, after her last glimpse of that barren mountain-side of sliding shale, to find herself lying half buried in grass and flowers with the warm sunshine laying a level ray across her face. She got to her knees and then to her feet, and found that she was possessed of a dizzy head and an aching shoulder, that she was bruised and lame, but otherwise uninjured. Looking up, she could see where

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

the slope of loose stone, down which she and the horse had slid, ended in a straight wall, a drop of eight or ten feet, over which she had plunged into the soft grass below. Buck, wiser than she, had evidently managed to slide less precipitately, and in the end had saved himself by jumping. His legs were cut by the sharp stones and he was still nervous and quivering, but he was not seriously harmed.

Although she made an effort to climb into the saddle, Beatrice found that her knees were shaking and her head was so dizzy that she was forced to give up the attempt. With her hand upon the horse's neck, she walked along the crooked path trodden in the tall grass of this high mountain meadow. Bright flowers whose names she did not know brushed her skirts. The whole hillside, sloping to the west, was bathed in the last brightness of the waning sunlight. They passed through a tangle of poplar woods whose dense underbrush showed that it was second growth, springing

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

up after the pine forest had been cut. Then out into the open they came again, to look down into a broad, irrigated valley whose checker-board of fields followed the winding silver ribbon of the river.

And this hillside at her feet—was it a forest or a garden into which she had stumbled? Hundreds of little spruce-trees, as tall as her shoulder and all of the same height, marched in straight rows across the slope of the mountain, clothing the steep ground in a smooth mantle of lusty green. A stream wound downward through the plantation, and on its bank, on a level bench below her, were a clump of willows and a white cottage with a red roof and a wide-open door.

“That must be Dr. Minturn’s house,” Beatrice reflected and a moment later caught sight of Dr. Minturn himself.

He was sitting on a knoll at the edge of the woods, gazing down over his domain and hum-

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

ming a song in a deep, buzzing voice like a bumble-bee. He was a very tall man, with tremendous shoulders and a heavy thatch of gray hair. He did not notice Beatrice and Buck, even when they came close, but sat very still, his big hands lying idle on his knees. He had the air, however, of being intently busy about some project of his own. Beatrice watched him, fascinated, wondering what it could be that absorbed him so.

“What—what are you doing?” she asked at last.

He turned around to her, smiling slowly, seeming neither startled nor surprised.

“I ’m getting rich,” he said.

She looked so bewildered by his reply that he jumped up at once.

“That is one of my stupid jokes and I’ve startled you with it,” he exclaimed in a tone of self-reproach. “And you have come over that trail all alone—why, you’ve had an acci-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

dent. Come down to the house at once and let Miriam and me see what we can do for you."

He helped her into the saddle, took Buck's bridle, and conducted them down through the rows of spicy-smelling little trees to the door of the cottage. On the way Beatrice managed to explain why she had come and at whose suggestion. The doctor nodded his head in immediate agreement.

"To be sure, I will go," he said. "I would do anything for John Herrick or a friend of his, so that's all settled. Here's Miriam coming to the gate to meet you."

The cottage was square and neat and white and had a garden before it, surrounded by a white paling fence—the first garden Beatrice had seen since she came to Broken Bow Valley. It gave her a pang of homesickness to look at the tangled hedge of pink wild roses, the clumps of yellow lilies and forget-me-nots, and the bright borders of pansies. Miriam, at

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

the gate, was a plump, quiet-voiced person with smooth gray hair and a placid smile.

"Miriam would have a garden," Dr. Minturn said when the greetings were over and Beatrice had admired the flowers. "Almost everything in it is just what runs wild over the mountains, but she prefers them behind a fence. I think she dreams at night of how to make those big, wild forget-me-nots look like the little cultivated ones."

"The doctor likes to make fun of my garden," Mrs. Minturn said in her pleasant soft voice. "But it is not very different from what he has done with the whole mountain-side. It was as bare as your hand when we came here, and he has planted every one of the little pines himself and has nursed each tree as though it were a baby. We call it Christmas-tree Hill. But come in, my dear; you must rest and wash that cut on your cheek."

She led Beatrice to the house and, in taking it quite for granted that her guest was to

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

spend the night, conducted her to what the girl thought was the smallest and cleanest bedroom she had ever seen. Here Mrs. Minturn insisted that she must lie down and be tucked up under the patchwork quilt and "go to sleep for an hour if she could." Beatrice did not sleep, but lay very peacefully, staring at the rough plastered walls of the tiny room or, through the window, at the myriad little trees stepping in their straight, decorous rows across the side of the hill. Long before the hour was over she was beginning to feel quite rested and herself again, and when her hostess came to announce that supper was ready she was sitting at the window, gazing out at the sunset light on the white peaks of the range opposite.

After they had eaten, Dr. Minturn insisted that she make a tour of the place and, "Go on, my dear, I don't need any help with the dishes," Mrs. Minturn said when her guest wished to stay and assist her. "It is n't often

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

that the doctor has a chance to show things off to a new person, so don't deny him the pleasure."

Beatrice accordingly saw everything: the horses, the contented cows, even the cheerful pig grunting happily to himself in his spotless sty. The chickens occupied a substantial residence on account of the owls, coyotes, martens, and other wild animals that lent difficulty and excitement to poultry raising in the Rocky Mountains. Then the doctor led Beatrice beyond the garden and the clump of willows to where she could see the whole sweep of the mountain and the shadows flooding the valley as darkness crept up the hill.

"It was a plan of my own, this replanting where the pine forest has been cut," he explained, as he sat down by Beatrice on the grassy slope, evidently delighted to have some one to listen to his enthusiasm. "The Government does a good deal of this reforesting where tracts have been cut down or burned,

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

but they can't give the trees the care that I do. Nobody could except a man who loves them. As they grow big I keep taking out some for Christmas-trees or for small timber, but the bulk of them shall never be cut until they have grown to be giants, a hundred feet high. I love to sit here and watch them, each year a little bigger, each year more valuable. It will be a wonderful piece of timber land fifty, sixty, seventy years from now."

"But—but——" began Beatrice and stopped. She had almost blurted out that a man who was gray-haired at the planting of these trees could not hope to see them grow to that mighty forest of which he dreamed.

"Oh, I know I will be gone long before then," he replied serenely, "but what does it matter? We live here in the mountains to keep Miriam well; she does n't get on in the valleys and towns. She has her garden and I have my trees and we are happy enough,

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

thinking about the future, even if it is a future long beyond our time. Mines that we never heard of will be timbered from these trees, to bring out gold and silver for our children's children; there will be ships with these pines for masts that will sail to ports I never saw. There will be houses built—I can almost see the people that will be born and live and die under the roofs that my trees will make.”

His eyes had been on the far distance, but he turned to fix them intently on Beatrice's.

“If you live on a mountain,” he said, “you can see much more than if you belong to the crowded, pushing, hurrying people that stay in the valley.”

“And now,” he declared, after a little pause, “here I have talked and talked just as Miriam said I would, but I want you to have a turn. You have told us your name and that you know John Herrick, but may I hear the rest? Where are you living and how did you happen



THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

to come to Ely? Strangers are not so common but that we backwoods people like to know all about them."

Rather to her own surprise Beatrice found herself telling not only what she hoped he would do for her aunt, but all about why they had come to Ely, even to her own puzzle as to what Aunt Anna's special reason had been for insisting so earnestly that she would not go away. She told him of the strike, of her acquaintance with Christina, the visit of Dabney Mills, and her new-found friendship with Hester Herrick. He looked concerned over some portions of her tale and smiled over others. He laughed aloud when she described the midnight departure of Joe Ling.

"You were right to give up when he went away," he commented. "The Chinamen in these valleys seem to know everything and just when to get out of the way of trouble. I know Joe. He has a little house and truck garden outside of Ely. He will stay there

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

quietly until, in his own strange way, he has found out that the disturbance is over for good, and then he will come back." He nodded with satisfaction when she spoke of the Herricks.

"I am glad you know them," he said. "We—we think a lot of Hester ourselves, and John Herrick—there are few men I like and admire as much."

"I like them too," agreed Beatrice. "I don't understand just how they belong to each other; she says he is n't really her father."

"I'll not forget," Dr. Minturn began slowly; "I'll not forget in a long time the day I first saw John Herrick. I was up at the edge of the woods where you found me and he came riding down the trail: had been riding all night or longer than that, perhaps. By the look on his face I could see that black trouble rode behind him and that he had not been able to gallop away from it. I did n't say much to him, but I brought him home—

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

he and the horse were dead tired—and we got him to stay with us for three days, until that strained look began to disappear from his face. I did n't know what had happened to him and I did n't dare to ask. That was ten years ago and I know him nearly as well as I know myself, but I have never asked him yet."

"And did he have Hester with him then?" Beatrice asked.

"Bless you, no. Hester lived with us. She was born at our house and her mother died there; her father had died before. They were some far kin of Miriam's, and we kept the baby when the others were gone. Our own two children were grown up and married, so we were glad enough to have her ourselves. She was six years old, a fat, merry little thing, and the way she and John took to each other would do your heart good. He would sit on the door-stone and play with her for hours, or they would take walks together, up and down the rows of pine-trees, the first ones that

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

had been planted then. He came back to see us many times, for he rode back and forth among the mountains, looking at mines, buying up ranches. Everything he touched seemed to prosper, but he never looked happy. It was a whole year after, that he came one day and said he wanted Hester."

"Oh, how could you give her up?" exclaimed Beatrice.

"I thought I could n't," returned the doctor rather glumly, "and I vowed I would n't, but Miriam said to me, 'Look at his face, can't you see how he needs her?' and of course in the end I had to give in. The care of a small child was really too much for Miriam. If John had not seen that, he would never have asked for her. Herrick is better off than we; he can do a great deal for Hester that we never could. While she has been growing up she has had everything that a sensible rich man's money could give her. He built that house just for her, and, oh, he is a lonely man

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

in it when she is away at school. She came back to stay with us when he went overseas during the war, but they surely were glad to be together again."

"And you never knew where he came from?" the girl questioned wonderingly.

"Neither that nor what trouble drove him to our mountains. We don't go too deep into a man's past in the West. We like him and stand by him for what he is."

It was quite dark now, and a white blot, moving through the dusk toward them, proved to be Mrs. Minturn's gown, as her quiet voice presently proved.

"I am sure the doctor must have told you the history of every tree by now, even to the ones that the badgers dug up and the rows the deer nibbled. It is time you both came in."

"Only think, she lives in the cabin where you planted the pansies," her husband returned as he raised his long length from the bank where they had been sitting.

CHRISTMAS-TREE HILL

"Oh, did you plant them?" asked Beatrice. "I believe they were what made me love the place the first time I saw it."

"Yes, it was I that put them there. We had been over to see Hester and I had bought a basketful of the plants in Ely, though the doctor laughed at me and said I had no room for them in the crowded garden. He was quite right, so, when Hester and I took a walk while he was talking business with John, we happened to go by the cabin and it looked so lonely that I just stopped and we planted the pansies by the steps. I am glad they are growing. And now you must come in for you need sleep, I know. As I say, the doctor loves to talk of his trees but I feel sure he has told you everything."

"All but one thing," Dr. Minturn said as he tucked Miriam's arm under his and turned toward the house. "That is, that Christmas-tree Hill is to belong to Hester some day when you and I can't enjoy it any more."

CHAPTER VI

OLAF

SPED by the kindly farewells of Miriam, Beatrice and Dr. Minturn set out next day on their return ride across the pass and reached the cabin without undue adventure. During the doctor's long interview with Aunt Anna, the two girls sat beside the fire, holding each other's hands tightly, neither speaking a word to voice her hopes or fears. When the doctor came out, however, one glimpse of his smiling face was enough to cheer them both.

"Nothing seriously wrong," was his verdict, "and you have brought her to just the climate and just the sort of life to make her well." He gave them long and careful directions as to what they were to do and then got up to say good-bye. "I am going over to John

OLAF

Herrick's to spend the night, and I will see you again before I go back."

He visited the village also before his departure, for he seemed interested in the progress of the trouble there. He had a long talk with Nancy and Beatrice out under the pines beside the stream the next morning.

"Your aunt will get well," he assured them. "She is anxious and unhappy and troubled, besides her illness. You say that you don't understand why, but in time she may tell you."

"Did she tell you?" Nancy asked him suddenly for he was the sort of person to invite confidences.

"No, she told me very little, but old doctors guess a great deal. She will tell you herself some day."

He went on to explain that a sleeping-porch must be added to the cabin, since it was imperative that she sleep out of doors.

"I spoke about it to John Herrick and he can send some one over to build it for you,"

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

he said. "Old Tim who works for him is a carpenter of sorts, though he is rather tottery and slow and you must not be impatient if the work seems to drag. Now I believe that is all."

"I wish I could tell you——" Beatrice began as he got up. She wanted to thank him for breaking out of his long retirement and rendering services for which he would accept no fee. He cut short her halting words at once.

"I don't want to hear anything about that," he declared. "Just be careful of your aunt and get her confidence if you can. I will be here again before so very long. That situation in the village bears watching and I want to see how it turns out. I never saw anything quite like it—all the idle men wrangling and quarreling, since there is no one outside to quarrel with. The fellow that got away with the money and shut down the works, he is the one they are after, but since neither they nor the sheriff nor that clever reporter

OLAF

fellow can find him, they have to take out their bad humor on one another. It is a dangerous place, a town full of ugly-tempered men, especially when they have some one like that Thorvik to keep the agitation boiling."

"But who could have taken the money?" asked Nancy.

"Blessed if I know," returned the doctor. "There was n't even a masked man with a black horse and a pair of automatics such as the movies tell us belong to an affair like that. Well, I must be getting back to Miriam. Good-by."

He clambered, with his awkward length, into the saddle, and set off, leaving the girls much lighter of heart than they had been before his visit. It would be hard to measure the extent of their gratitude.

Next day old Tim, with his tools over his shoulder and a creaking wagon-load of lumber following him up to the gate, came to begin on the sleeping-porch. It was quite true that

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

he worked very slowly and that after ten days the porch was still not finished, but his efforts to make everything as comfortable as possible were so earnest that the girls could not grow impatient with him. At the end of that time he appeared one morning with a helper, a broad-shouldered boy of about eighteen with tow-colored hair and the widest and most friendly smile Beatrice had ever seen.

“Who is he? Did he come from the village?” she asked, but old Tim answered evasively. He was just some one staying at John Her-rick’s for a while, and he thought he would come over and help. Beyond that she could learn nothing, although she noticed that when supplies were wanted from Ely it was always old Tim who went for them, never his younger helper. The boy worked hard and was as shy of speech as Tim was fluent. After his coming the building went on rapidly. All sorts of improvements were added besides the porch. Cupboards in the kitchen had been demanded

OLAF

by Nancy, but they had not dreamed of dormer-windows for their little rooms under the roof, high-backed settles for the fireplace, and a palatial box stall for Buck. The request "for a few shelves for pots and kettles" was materialized into a spacious pantry rich in cupboards, shelves, drawers, and pegs for the hanging of each utensil and into a transformed kitchen with everything rearranged to the great increase of comfort and convenience.

"We wanted John Herrick to come over and see what we had done," Tim said one day, "but somehow he does n't do it, though he is always asking about the work. A lot of the things we have done were his suggestion. Those sliding shutters on the porch were his special idea. There could n't be anything better to keep out the rain and snow."

"Snow?" echoed Nancy, who was standing beside him to admire his work as he loved to have her do. "Why, we are only going to be here for the summer!"

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"It can snow any day it wants to in these mountains," Tim returned. "There's more in January than in June, to be sure, but you may wake up any morning and find the ground white. It can snow just as easy as rain hereabouts."

Beatrice had been watching Tim's helper keenly from day to day with a growing suspicion lurking in her mind. Besides giving assistance with the building he came to the house daily with the milk and eggs that Hester supplied. One morning when she was astir early she saw him meet Christina on the path below the house and watched him take from her the basket in which she was bringing their marketing. In the thin quiet air their voices came up to her window more clearly than they seemed to realize.

"Isn't it too heavy?" he questioned. "And you're looking pale and tired. That—that Thorvik has been abusing you again. I'd like to get my hands on him."

OLAF

"No, no," cried Christina in terror, "you must not let him or any one in the village see you. You promised John Herrick you would not go near the town until he found out how things stood for you. He said it was safer and easier that no one at all should know you were here. Thorvik does not harm me; it is only the—the things he says about my good friends."

"I can't stand by and see him make you miserable," protested the boy hotly.

"You promised," repeated Christina obstinately. "You can't break the word you gave."

"Then some day I will be giving John Herrick his promise back again," he returned, his voice rising louder. "Thorvik will find——"

Christina, glancing anxiously at the windows, warned him to silence. They went together into the kitchen, leaving Beatrice to ponder what she had heard.

"That letter to Olaf got such a quick an-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

swer that it must have found him just back from a voyage," she was reflecting. "And we never read what he wrote. It must have been to say that he was coming home. I suppose they kept his being here a secret even from us so that if any one asked us we would not know. There is always that Dabney Mills hanging about trying to find out things."

The day was so full that she had little time to talk of the matter with Nancy until they sat by the fire late that evening. The blaze was always a grateful one on these nights that grew so chilly the moment the sun was gone. Aunt Anna had finally gone to bed on the new sleeping-porch, Nancy sat on one of Tim's settles by the hearth, knitting busily, while Beatrice, openly idle and dreaming, sat opposite gazing into the changing flames. Her mind was running afar upon such various things that even now she did not come immediately to the question of Christina's son.

OLAF

"Nancy," she said, "don't you begin to feel like an entirely different person from the one you were when we came here?"

Her sister nodded in quick assent.

"I never knew before that I could do so—so much *thinking*," she agreed rather vaguely. "I am busy every minute but there is time to turn things over in my mind, ever so many things about you and Aunt Anna and dad and myself and, oh—just about living. When I look back at last winter and all the time before, it seems as though we were always in a crowd of people, people who were all talking at once and all wanting me to do something with them in a hurry. I liked it, but I never had time to think about anything at all."

"Yes," returned Beatrice slowly, "there was always something to do and somewhere to go and that seemed all there was to living. Think of my head being so full of things that I forgot about having an uncle. I must have seen him and have heard dad and Aunt Anna

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

talk of him, but I never noticed it at last when he never came any more and was never mentioned. But I think about him now. I think about him more—and more.”

Nancy laid down her knitting and leaned forward.

“Do you?” she questioned. “So do I. Do you think it could be because of him, somehow, that Aunt Anna wanted to come here?” “It may be,” said Beatrice, “but, if it is, where is he?”

They looked at each other, an unspoken question in their eyes.

“There is another thing,” pursued Beatrice. “That boy who has been helping Tim is Christina’s son Olaf. I had thought so before but to-day I am certain.”

“I had been suspecting that too,” said Nancy. “One day I asked her if she did n’t want us to write her another letter, and she laughed, so happily, and said, ‘Not just yet.’”

The door from the bedroom opened softly

OLAF

and Aunt Anna came in. Her cheeks were pink from the fresh air outside, her fair hair was ruffled, and she was wrapped in the dark fur robe that the girls had laid over her bed. She looked very pretty as she sat in the big chair that they pulled out for her, the glow of the fire lighting her face.

"I heard your voices," she said, "and, though it is glorious out there with the sound of the water and with the tops of the trees showing against the stars, I was not able to sleep, so I thought I would come in and talk to you a little." She leaned back in her chair and sighed blissfully. "What good care you take of me and how well I feel! I do not seem to be the same person."

The girls laughed in unison, it was so like what they had been saying.

"Beatrice," her aunt went on suddenly, "Dr. Minturn told me about your falling over the cliff when you went to fetch him for me."

"It was not much of a cliff," returned

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

Beatrice sheepishly, involuntarily rubbing the bruised elbow that was now the one memento of her misadventure. She had meant to keep that incident from Aunt Anna's knowledge.

"It frightened me," her aunt said, "but it opened my eyes to what you were willing to do for me. We are all of us changed and we are all beginning to understand one another better. At home, with your rounds of shopping and motoring and dancing, I used to think we were not much more than casually acquainted. And there was something of which I always wanted to talk to you, but I wondered if a day would ever come when you would have time to listen and understand. I did not want you to hear unless you could see it all as clearly as I did myself."

"And do you think," asked Beatrice, her voice low and eager, "do you believe that the time has come now?"

"Yes," was the answer, "I think the time has come now. It is right that you should

OLAF

hear at last what has been hanging heavy on my heart for these ten years—about why I came here—about my brother.”

CHAPTER VII

“MY BROTHER JACK”

“**I** HAVE often wondered,” Aunt Anna began her story that was to explain so much that the girls had not understood; “I have often wondered that you did not remember your uncle, my younger brother Jack. When you talked of things you had done when you were small children, I used to listen hungrily, hoping you might speak of him, but you never did. He was with us a great deal when you were little things, and he was always in the nursery or playing with you in the garden, for he loved children. That was soon after I came to live with you, and when he was in college, studying to be an engineer. He spent all his vacations with us: I wish you had not been too young to remember.”

“MY BROTHER JACK”

Beatrice wrinkled her brows and vainly searched for a fleeting recollection.

“I don’t remember anything clearly,” she said at last. “There has been so much between.”

“When my brother left college he went to work immediately and was so eager and interested in his first ‘job.’ It was the building of a dam and reservoir for the water supply of a town near us, a project that was being financed by the company of which your father is a director. It was through his means that Jack was put in charge of the work, although he was very young for such responsibility, too young, I insisted at the time. And it was proved that he was too young. He did his work well, he was a brilliant engineer, but he trusted too much to the honor of other people and he—he did not take things as an older man would.”

She paused, and Nancy, putting down her

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

knitting, came to sit on the floor beside her chair.

“Poor Aunt Anna,” she said, “did something dreadful happen?”

Slowly her aunt nodded, looking steadily into the fire, as though tears might come should she allow her eyes to waver.

“Yes,” she answered, “something happened that has darkened my life, every day of it, for all these years.

“We did not see so much of my brother after he began working, for he was absorbed and busy. As is usual in such cases, a contractor was doing the work under his planning and his supervision. Things went very well—for some months. Then one day, like a thunderclap, came the news that the project was being carried on with gross dishonesty. A great deal more money had been advanced for the work than had actually been spent on construction, false records of costs had been turned in, machinery ordered and not paid for,

“MY BROTHER JACK”

debts incurred on every side, with many thousands of dollars completely vanished. Some one, it was evident, had been pocketing the difference, and an immediate investigation was set on foot.

“It was a terrible blow to your father. I do not know myself what he thought when the facts first became known, but he at once asked some of his fellow-directors to meet at his house and said that Jack would be there to explain matters to them before there should be a formal meeting of the whole board next day. They called me in to act as secretary, since they wanted a record kept but desired the whole affair to be kept private. I can remember how my knees shook as I went in and sat down at the end of the library table. There were five men there, most of them gray-headed, all of them unspeaking, even your father. I was in a wild hurry to have Jack come. I wanted the matter cleared quickly. I could hardly keep from crying out in the

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

storm of impatience and suspense I felt during those minutes we waited.

“He came at last and I can shut my eyes and see him still, standing before that group of grave men, so young, so white-faced and excited, so eager to explain. They asked him questions and he answered them in the straight-forward way he always had. They looked more serious and questioned him again, while my hands shook as I wrote down the answers, they were so frank and open, and they were doing him so much harm.

“ ‘Why had he not gone over the accounts more thoroughly?’

“He had felt that his work was the scientific end of the enterprise. He had left financial matters almost entirely to the contractor, who, so he had considered, was completely honest.

“ ‘Did he suspect the man now?’

“It was plain from the misappropriation of the funds that the man had been robbing them.

“Yes, but could he offer material proof that

“MY BROTHER JACK”

it was the contractor, and he alone, who had been pocketing the money?”

“No, he had no proof, so far.

“He was so inexperienced, so sure that every one was as honorable as he, so certain that everybody had equal faith in him. He was half-way through the interview before he realized what they suspected.

“I had thought, when he came in, how much of a boy he was still. Then, all in one moment, I saw him grow to be a man. The idea that they might consider him guilty seemed to deal him a staggering blow, as though some one had actually struck him between the eyes.

“‘You believe that I have profited by this dirty business, you think that my own hands are not clean?’ he cried out suddenly, and waited a long minute for some one to answer.

“In every group there is always at least one man of a certain type, hard, inflexible, strict with himself, and merciless to others. Robert Kirby was the man of that sort in our

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

company that day. He sat at the opposite end of the table from me, and I had watched him nervously as he turned his little sharp eyes on Jack and never moved them from his face. By some terrible mischance it was he who found words first.

“ ‘After all you have said,’ he declared in his cutting voice, ‘it would be hard for any of us to believe otherwise.’

“ ‘Jack wheeled to your father and faced him, not with a question, but an accusation.

“ ‘You believe it too!’ he cried.

“ ‘Your father is slow of speech at best and he was excited and upset. He voiced his faith in his brother, but he spoke a second too late.

“ ‘You all of you believe it, every one. It is because your eyes are as blind as the dollars you are always counting.’

“ ‘He turned so quickly to the door that no one could stop him. I was the only one that managed to move as he flung it open.

“ ‘Not I.’ With all my strength I called it

“MY BROTHER JACK”

after him as I stood up in my place at the end of the table. ‘Oh Jack, not I!’

“But the door had slammed so quickly that I think he did not hear.

“We all sat very still, unable to speak, ashamed even to look at one another. Robert Kirby again was the first to break the silence.

“‘He should be stopped; he must be put under arrest,’ he said, but your father got up and stood with his back against the door.

“‘If it is true that my brother is guilty, and Heaven grant it is not so,’ he declared, ‘all the money shall be repaid at once. This matter is to go no farther.’

“We never saw Jack again. Your father had a letter from him, saying that of course he considered himself responsible for the losses to the company since his own folly had brought them about. ‘Other people may think I am guilty if they like. If you and Anna do not believe in me I do not care what decision Robert Kirby and his friends come to,’ he

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

added. He had disposed of all the property left to him by our father and was turning over the sum realized to cover the defaulted amount. There was a little lacking, a few hundred dollars, and this he was obliged—you could see even in that business-like letter how it hurt him to do so—to ask your father to advance. In return he was delivering to him the title deeds 'to that piece of land in Montana, Anna can tell you about it, there is no time to sell that in a hurry and I want this infernal business closed.' That was the only letter we ever received from him, and that was ten years ago.

"The land he spoke of was this bit of hillside, with the cabin, where we are living now. We took a gay journey, during one of Jack's vacations, just vaguely 'West' because he had always said there was the best opening for a man in the Western States, and he hoped to live there some day. His grandmother had given him a thousand dollars, 'just to see how he would invest it,' she said, and was a little

“MY BROTHER JACK”

dismayed when he came back and told her he had purchased a part of a mountain in Montana. We had been to the Coast; we had seen the Grand Cañon and Yellowstone Park. It was a man we met in the Park who persuaded Jack to buy this piece of land, saying that the timber on it was worth a good deal and there was always the chance of a mine. We come over to see the purchase and spent a day in Ely, though most of it was put in riding through the hills and scrambling over as many steep trails as we could find. We climbed so high we could see valley after valley spread out below us, and the air was so clear one felt that it was possible to see half-way round the world if only the mountains did not block the way. There were two or three riders scattered over the trail below, tiny black figures like toys, although everything was so still we could hear their voices shouting to one another and could hear the plunge and splash of a waterfall a mile away. It had

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

been snowing on the peaks, but where we were it was hot in the blazing sunshine. Jack sat staring, staring, and staring into the valley and at last he said:

“Anna, from a height like this you ought to be able to see what sort of a place the world really is.”

“I have never forgotten.”

A burning pine cone fell from the heap of coals and rolled out on the hearth. Beatrice, who had been listening so intently that she had not moved, rose now and fell to mending the fire.

“And did you never find any trace of him?” Nancy gently brought Aunt Anna back to her story.

“Never, my dear, though we tried in every way you could imagine. He was determined to disappear out of our lives, and we were not able to prevent it. A year or two later the same contractor was proved to be connected with some such scandalous frauds that he was

“MY BROTHER JACK”

sent to the penitentiary. The first matter was dropped on account of your father's influence and the fact that Jack had made restitution, so that the man was bolder when he tried again. Your father had made some effort to procure proof against him, but there was nothing definite enough to exonerate Jack before the world. When the man was finally convicted, we thought that must surely clear my brother's name. Yet I was present when your father laid the facts before Robert Kirby, who only grunted and said that nothing could convince him that they had not worked together the first time. When I say my prayers and come to the place where we must forgive our enemies, I have to struggle with myself all over again to forgive Robert Kirby, although all the time I know him to be nothing but a misled, ignorant, obstinate old man.”

“I would call him something worse,” declared Nancy with heat.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

There was quiet for a little as they all sat thinking.

“And did you think that you might find him here, Aunt Anna?” Beatrice finally asked slowly.

“I thought we might find him or get news of him. When the doctor said this year I must go away or—or not get well, I vowed that, if it were the last thing I did, I would look for him once more. He loved this place so much that I always felt, somehow, that he would come back to it. We had written to him here, but the letters came back to us with word that no such person was to be found; and your father made inquiries when he came to get us a house. He did not approve much of our settling down here for the summer, but I was determined and he had to give way.”

“Yet we almost had to go back,” Nancy observed.

“Yes, if it had not been for Beatrice’s thinking of the cabin and for her courage in bring-

“MY BROTHER JACK”

ing us here, we would have had to give it up. And so far we have heard nothing, but I cannot help hoping that we still may.”

“But why, Aunt Anna, why did you never tell us before?” Beatrice put the question with the same puzzled frown she had worn when the story began.

“I wanted to, but I could not bear to. You were always so hurried and so deep in affairs of your own, as is the natural thing. To tell you and have you think, even for a fleeting minute, that my brother did wrong—that would have been beyond endurance. He is only a name to you, and after all, as Robert Kirby says, nothing has ever been proved. But you *must* believe in my brother; you *must*.”

She leaned back and a slow tear of weariness and long-endured misery rolled down her cheek. The recital had tired her far more than they had realized, so that Nancy, suddenly taking alarm, whisked her away to bed. There, with many loving pats and hugs and

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

words of affectionate comfort, they at last saw her ready for sleep.

[Yet Beatrice, lying broad awake in her little room, watching the curtains flutter in the windy dark, could not put from her mind the thought of what she had heard. Presently she got up to steal into Nancy's room opposite and see how she was faring. She found that the bed was empty and that her sister was kneeling by the window, staring out into the forest. A solitary coyote was yelping in the woods, but it was a sound to which they had become so accustomed that it was doubtful if they even heard it. The pale light of a late moon showed the moving tree-tops, the dark chasm of the stream, and, hardly to be discerned among the pines, the square chimney stacks and one tiny light that marked the place of John Herrick's house.

"Don't stay there in the cold," remonstrated Beatrice. "You can't see anything or—or anybody in the middle of the night."

“MY BROTHER JACK”

“I know it,” sighed Nancy as she turned from the window. “I was just thinking.”

She climbed on the bed and sat with her knees humped and her arm flung around them, still staring, as thought fascinated, out through the window toward that slope of the mountain where John Herrick lived.

“He does n’t look like dad or Aunt Anna,” Beatrice protested suddenly, with no apparent connection with anything that had been said. “No, he is n’t like them at all.”

“Maybe not,” returned Nancy inscrutably, “but he has that same light yellow hair that she has. If Aunt Anna were very sunburnt or he were very pale—it might be—that they would not be so very different.”

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. BRUIN

ALTHOUGH the girls had talked so late of Aunt Anna's story and the strange thought they had concerning it, they were up early next morning and still discussing the matter busily as they prepared breakfast.

"The question is," said Nancy, plying her egg-beater with vigor, "shall we tell Aunt Anna what we think "

"If we should be mistaken, and John Herrick should turn out to be, oh, just anybody, she would be so disappointed. Perhaps we had better wait."

They had hardly finished breakfast when there was a knock at the door, followed by Dr. Minturn's tall presence on the threshold. He inspected his patient and announced a very

MRS. BRUIN

great improvement, and then said he must go on at once, since he hoped to visit the town and start back over the mountain that same day. Beatrice walked down with him through the pines, for he had tied his horse at the gate.

"Your aunt seems less worried and far more cheerful than before," he said.

"Yes," assented Beatrice, "I think it is because she has told us at last why she came." She went on to give the substance of Aunt Anna's story.

"I surmised it was something like that," he observed when he had heard her to the end, "and I have been thinking about it ever since. I don't know any man in this neighborhood by the name of Deems but—I believe he is not so far away after all."

Beatrice looked at him steadily.

"I believe that too," she said.

Dr. Minturn stopped, for they had reached the bars, but he made no move to mount his horse.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"I'm going to give you some advice that is n't medical," he began. "I think more of John Herrick than of any other man in the world, barring my own son, perhaps, and I love Hester as though she were mine. And you three here, your aunt and your sister and you, I have come to think of you all as better friends than I had ever thought to make again. Your aunt—why, she has more pluck in one inch of that little sick body of hers than I have in my whole big self, and her girls are n't far behind her. I'd like to see her have what she wants, I'd like to see you all happy."

He drew a long breath and spoke lower.

"Whatever you think is or is n't so," he warned, "don't—press anybody too hard, don't push some one by letting him know too quickly that you have guessed who he is. Your aunt is eager and overwrought; who would n't be, after ten years of anxiety and sorrow? She and you might be in too much of a hurry and ruin everything. John thinks he is safe under

MRS. BRUIN

his assumed name and with your aunt too ill to be about. He knows who you are and perhaps why you have come, but he can't yet make up his mind to conquer his stubborn pride. Give him time, that is all I say, give him time. He rode away into the hills the first day he saw you, but he must have thought things out up there in the mountains, for he came back again. But he can't come all the way yet."

"Do you think he ever will?" Beatrice asked anxiously.

"Yes, I think he will. Does your aunt have any suspicion of who he is?"

"I am sure she has n't," Beatrice declared. "She thinks of him as Hester's father, some one too old to be her brother. No, she does n't dream it."

"Then don't tell her and don't tell him," he urged. "Wait until John is ready to tell her himself. You must go gently with a man who has been hurt to his very soul."

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

Beatrice held out her brown hand and the doctor shook it solemnly. She watched him ride away; then returned to the house to saddle Buck and set off presently up the mountain. Her mind was full of new, excited hopes that seemed to dance to the music of Buck's flying feet.

Nancy, meanwhile, was not thinking so much of their new problem. She had the faculty of being completely absorbed in the object in hand and to-day that object was a cake. Christina had given her a Scandinavian recipe, dwelling so much on the unusual deliciousness of the result that Nancy could scarcely wait to try it. With the greatest of care she mixed and measured and weighed and stirred.

"It is rather a long cake," she reflected after she had spent an hour combining the ingredients, but she felt certain that the completed dish would amply repay her toil.

She had just got it into the oven when a knock sounded on the kitchen door to an-

MRS. BRUIN

nounce the boy whom Hester had sent with a basket of eggs.

"Thank you, Olaf," she said as he set them down; then flushed since she had not meant to speak his name. The color flooded his face also. "I beg your pardon," she added quickly "We have been guessing who you were, but we did n't mean to pry into any secrets."

"It does not matter," he assured her. "My mother and John Herrick made me promise that I would not go to the village while things were so upset, since he says there is no use in stirring up bad feeling again. Your sister's letter caught me in San Francisco, just as I was to sail; but I could n't help coming home, once I knew that my mother really wanted to see me. But I don't like this hiding away, and I only agreed to it because I would do anything John Herrick says."

Old Tim came in to put away his tools and to sit down upon the doorstep for a moment to rest.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"I can't think of another thing to do to this cabin," he confessed. "I have to own that it is time for me to go home."

He was just getting up to take his leave when a step was heard on the path and Dabney Mills came around the corner of the house, smiling and quite unabashed by any memories of his departure some days before.

"I heard voices," he said, "so I just thought I would n't disturb any one by knocking at the front door and would——"

"Would see if you could n't overhear something," Tim cut him short. "Well, we're not speaking of anything you should n't hear, so our talk would n't interest you."

He walked away leaving the intruding youth looking after him in speechless indignation. Nancy turned to the stove to look at her cake.

"I don't know this gentleman," she heard Dabney say, staring at Olaf, and she heard Tim reply over his shoulder, "Nor do you need to know him, so far as I can see."

MRS. BRUIN

"I heard you talk of going berrying the other day, Miss Nancy," Olaf said, coming to the door and quite disregarding the inquisitive reporter. "This is the best sort of a day for it, and I can show you just where to go. Your sister is coming up the hill, so your aunt won't be left alone. Would n't you like to come?"

"I would indeed! Will you excuse us?" she added politely to Dabney Mills, to which he gave a gruff assent and stalked out of sight around the corner of the house. She felt anxious to escape from his questions, and was sure that, in the hands of the determined Beatrice, he could find out very little. She fetched her hat and her basket and set off gaily, since to look for berries had been a cherished project for some days.

"If I could just square off and hit him," Olaf said regretfully looking back for a final glare at Dabney, "that might settled him once for all."

"No," Nancy returned wisely, "it would only

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

begin a lot of trouble that would involve more people than yourself."

"So John Herrick says," the boy agreed with a sigh, "though it still seems to me the simplest way out of it."

They scrambled up the hill, out beyond the shadow of the pines to the open pasture land where the trees had been cut, where the new growth was springing up, and where among the old stumps the berry bushes and vines matted the ground. It was a hot summer day, very still, except for the grasshoppers singing shrilly, but not with that peaceful drowsy heat that Nancy knew. The air was far too bracing for any one to feel lazy or sleepy as on the summer days at home. The blue distances shimmered, the sky was cloudless, everything seemed to stir and throb with the energy of living. The baskets filled rapidly as the two went from one patch to another, climbing higher and higher up the mountain.

MRS. BRUIN

Suddenly Olaf glanced over his shoulder and then turned about quickly.

"Just look there," he said in a low voice.

Something like a big black dog was moving among the bushes, its smooth round back showing now and again above the tangled thicket. Presently, as it crossed an open space, Nancy saw it more clearly, with its small head, clumsy feet, and odd shuffling walk. She had never seen a bear at large before.

"Oh," she breathed, and dropped her basket.

"There is no need to be afraid," Olaf assured her. "A bear won't bother you at all if you leave him alone. They have ugly tempers, and if you once make them angry they will follow you a long way to get even. But this one won't hurt us."

The creature, at first quite unconscious of their presence, went slowly along, snuffing among the roots, turning over stones to lick up the ants beneath them. Finally observing

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

them, it stood on its hind legs to peer over a clump of bushes, looking so much like a shy, but inquisitive boy that Nancy laughed aloud.

"Oh, see, there's another, two little ones," she exclaimed.

Olaf looked where she pointed and took up the baskets hastily. "If there are cubs it is quite a different thing," he said quickly. "A mother bear never does anything you think she will. It would be better for us to go."

The bear stood watching their hasty departure for a moment; then, with a grunt, dropped on all fours again and turned once more to the pursuit of her dinner. Nancy, looking back, caught sight of the fat, round cubs as they came scampering forward to run at their mother's heels. One of them tumbled over and rolled upon the grass, whereupon its mother turned to lick it affectionately and give it a friendly cuff with her big paw. Evidently she considered the incident, so far as human beings were concerned, as being quite closed.

MRS. BRUIN

Beatrice and Hester were at the cabin when the two berry pickers returned. They declared that they had seen nothing of Dabney Mills, who had apparently taken himself off. They had a hilarious lunch, during which Beatrice imitated the airs and graces of the insistent reporter, while Nancy, as she waited on the table, assumed the shuffling mannerisms of Joe Ling. Aunt Anna declared herself so worn out with laughing at them that she retired early for her nap, and Beatrice presently, after Hester was gone, went upstairs to sleep also. Nancy spent a large part of the afternoon finishing her cake, for even the icing, with its alternate layers of brown and white was a work of art in itself. Finally the task was completed, however, and the dish set to cool on the window-ledge. When at last it became time to think about the evening meal she discovered that she needed fresh kindling for the fire and went out to the shed to fetch it. She opened the door and started back with a

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

cry of surprise. Seated on the straw, with his back to the wall and his note-book on his knee, was Dabney Mills.

"I heard that fellow, Olaf you call him, say that he was coming back at four o'clock with the milk, so I came back to have a word with him when we should n't be disturbed. I've been waiting quite a while. He's late," he declared crossly. He got up and walked stiffly to the door.

"Say," he exclaimed, "what's that beside your window. I do believe it's a bear!" His tone was one of undisguised dismay.

"Where?" said Nancy, running out after him. "Oh, my cake, my cake!" she cried in distress.

The same creature that she and Olaf had seen when they were berrying had come down the hill and was running an investigating and appreciative tongue over the icing of the precious cake. She had been used, perhaps, to prowl about the cabin when it was empty and

MRS. BRUIN

was now making herself very much at home. Although plainly pleased with her refreshment, she dropped down when she heard their voices and began to shamble off toward the sheltering underbrush.

“Let her go quietly,” Nancy warned, “don’t disturb her, don’t, *don’t!*”

Dabney Mills plucking up courage at the animal’s willingness to depart, was attempting to speed her going by throwing stones after her. Picking up a square block of wood from beside the shed, he flung it with unfortunate success, in spite of Nancy’s catching at his arm. It caught the bear full on the side of the head.

She turned, bared all her teeth in an angry snarl, and rushed upon them. Without ceremony they fled, past the shed, away from the house, and up the hill. To reach the safety of the cabin, they would have to pass by her, which at the moment was unthinkable. Therefore, as the angry creature climbed steadily after them, they were forced further and fur-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

ther up toward the open spaces of the mountain.

"I'm not afraid. She won't hurt us," Nancy kept telling herself, though her teeth were chattering and her breath was coming short. Bewildered as she was, she still had presence of mind enough to try to bend their course in a circle so that at last they might come nearer home. But no such coolness possessed her companion. Excited, almost hysterical with terror, he shouted at the bear, waved his arms, and threw sticks and stones at her every time the steep trail afforded him opportunity.

"Stop, don't, you are only making it worse," Nancy begged him breathlessly, but he was far too terrified to pay any heed to her words.

Nancy felt that there could be nothing more terrible than this big swaying body that came up the hill after them, the little pointed head with its white teeth showing, its small eyes blazing with an animal's unreasoning fury.

MRS. BRUIN

She was panting and exhausted, her knees shook under her, it seemed utterly impossible to go farther. One last hope flashed through her mind: it was the hour for Olaf to bring the milk and he might be somewhere below, coming through the pines. She hollowed her hands before her mouth and, with a final effort of her panting lungs, shouted with all her might:

“Olaf, Olaf.”

A faint hail came in answer. How far away it was! Would he know what had happened?

There was only a little further for them to climb, for a long ridge of rock, shouldering up through the underbrush, cut off their ascent with its smooth wall that offered no foothold. Beside it the mountain-side fell away in a sheer drop of a hundred feet of precipice so that their retreat was blocked completely. A vast furry form rose through the bushes beside them, and the bear struck at them with her

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

great paw. Nancy was too bewildered to understand how Dabney Mills came suddenly to be behind her, while she was thrust forward into the very face of their enemy. The blow missed her, however, and struck the boy, just where she could not see. With a strange sickening sigh, he dropped and rolled toward the edge of the cliff. Nancy flattened herself against the rock wall, staring, fascinated, as the bear settled her haunches firmly, seemed to pause a moment, and then squared off to strike at her again.

CHAPTER IX

A DECISION

IT was not easy for either Nancy or Olaf to give any connected account afterward of their adventure with the bear. Nancy could never describe it clearly at all, and Olaf, when questioned, gave a very simple version of the rescue.

“I saw the bear striking at them when I came near, so I just whanged her over the head with the milk-bucket, and she beat it.”

Dabney Mills, who had no knowledge at the time of what was happening, was able, perhaps, to give the most picturesque story of the three. Not even he, however, was able to deny that it was the milk-pail that saved the day. Olaf had been carrying it on his arm when he heard Nancy's frantic cry for

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

help, and he had never thought of setting it down, nor did he spill quite all of the contents as he ran to help her. He had come panting up the slope, just in time to see the bear's blow graze the girl's shoulder and rip away her sleeve. Being still out of reach, he had hurled the unwieldy tin bucket with all his might and with most successful aim. The clanging blow with which it struck startled Nancy, and the unexpected spectacle of a stream of white milk pouring over those black, furry shoulders made her feel that she had been bereft of her senses.

"And I have seen," she said when she was trying to relate the tale to Beatrice, "what nobody else ever saw; I have seen a bear look surprised."

Astonishment and horror seemed, indeed, to take instant possession of Mrs. Bruin, for she dropped from the ledge and made off through the bushes. The milk-pail, dislodged from

A DECISION

where it had caught among the stones, rolled clanging and banging after her with a noise that lent even greater speed to her flight.

Olaf and Nancy stared at each other for a moment while his anxious face relaxed slowly into a broad grin and she burst out into irrepressible giggles. The strain of the terrible minutes that had just passed broke down suddenly into uncontrollable mirth so that gale after gale of laughter swept over them both. Nancy was so breathless from her desperate climb that laughing was painful, yet she could not check it and was forced to sit down upon the grass and lean against the rock wall in her helplessness. Olaf recovered first, rubbed his eyes, wet with laughter, on the sleeve of his coat, and was able to speak quite soberly.

"After all, it is n't so funny," he observed. He leaned far out over the precipice and looked down. "I thought you would go over before I got there."

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"We must look after Dabney Mills," Nancy reminded him suddenly. "Suppose he had been killed!"

"If he had it would be by no fault of his," Olaf muttered as he helped her to her feet and walked with her to where the reporter was sitting up, looking about him with a dazed expression.

"You were mighty slow coming," he said morosely to Olaf. "That brute could have knocked us into kingdom come."

He was feeling about vaguely, first in his pockets, then among the weeds and stones about him. A great blue bruise was spreading slowly over his face and neck.

"Have you lost something?" Nancy inquired.

"Just my note-book. I—I wanted to put something down in it."

He seemed still to be somewhat stunned, but he got up and went with them down the hill. For some time he was silent, an unusual

A DECISION

condition for him, but before they were half-way home he began to talk again, evidently composing a proper account of his adventure.

"A very dangerous, vicious animal!" he observed. "It was quite touch and go for a time, a very narrow escape! Of course, if I had been carrying any sort of weapon—"

Nancy interrupted with an exclamation, and Olaf with a covert chuckle. She was about to declare very frankly that if Olaf had been unarmed and Dabney possessed of the milk-bucket, the affair would not have been very different. Olaf, however, dropped behind and spoke to her in an undertone:

"Please let him go on. He will talk himself into believing he was quite a hero, and I want to hear him do it."

Aunt Anna was given a very mild account of the affair when they reached home, with little emphasis on the danger and a great deal on how absurd the bear had looked. Yet her eyes fell upon the deep scratches on Nancy's

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

arm and her torn sleeve, and then turned to Olaf with a look that made him suddenly glow with embarrassment and pride, but also made him bid them a panic-stricken good night. When Aunt Anna's glance traveled to Dabney Mills who was beginning to relate his version of the story quite fluently, he paused, stammered, and declared that he, too, must be going. There was no one present who pressed him to stay.

"I will have to give this to Hester for her chickens," said Nancy, surveying the wreck of her cake ruefully, just before she went to bed.

The girls had promised their aunt that they would not talk a great deal before they went to sleep, but they found it difficult to keep their word. Besides discussing the bear adventure they had also to talk over Dr. Min-turn's advice to Beatrice given that morning and heard by Nancy now for the first time.

"He said," quoted Beatrice, "'that we

A DECISION

must not hurry a man who has been hurt to his very soul.' ”

“I think the doctor was right,” the younger girl observed thoughtfully. “John Herrick—I can’t seem to call him anything else—must be just like Aunt Anna, with just such a will as hers. And the more he loved his family the more it must have hurt him to believe that they doubted his honor.”

“But suppose he never comes back to us,” said Beatrice. “Must we sit by and do nothing? He knew who we were from the first day we came here, but he has never made a sign.”

Although they had put out the light, the glowing hands of Beatrice’s wrist-watch reminded her of her promise. Nancy accordingly scurried into her own room to bed, and presumably dropped asleep as quickly as did Beatrice, who could hardly even remember laying her head upon the pillow.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

It must have been several hours later that Beatrice awoke. She had slept so soundly that all her weariness was gone and the faintest of sounds outside had broken through the thin fabric of her dreams. She sat up, and turned to the window close beside her bed, to peer out and to listen.

It was moonlight again—a very clear night and so quiet that the big pine-trees stood as immovable as though they were a painted forest on the drop curtain of a theater. The white flood of light set into sharp relief the square frame of the window. Beatrice, looking at the ruffled white curtains, the twin pots of berries on the sill, and the row of books below, thought how quaintly cozy and homelike it looked in contrast to that ghostly wilderness outside. Then, as she leaned against the frame to look out, she drew a deep breath of astonishment.

Very evidently Aunt Anna had been unable to sleep and was sitting, wrapped in her big

A DECISION

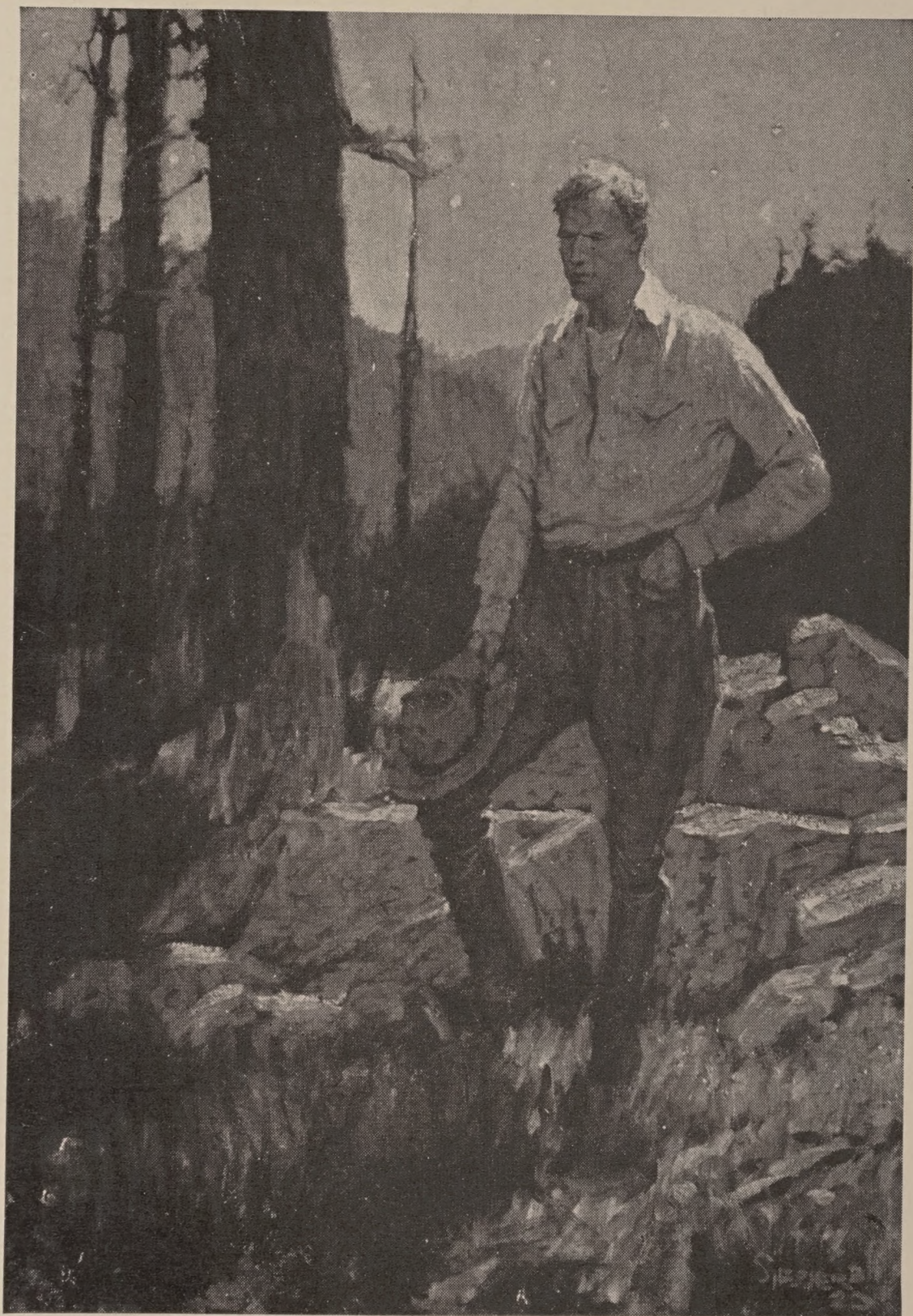
cloak, reading at the window just below, as was often her custom. A square of light on the ground below, and a shadow that moved a little now and then, as though for the turning of a page, made it plain that this was so. And opposite the window, in a clearing among the pines, some one was walking to and fro. It was John Herrick, with the moonlight on his fair hair and flooding the ground about him like a pool of still water. Somewhere in the dark behind him his horse was tied, for Beatrice, when she listened, could hear now and then the faint stamping of an impatient foot or the jingle of the bit.

If Aunt Anna heard the sounds, she did not distinguish them from the ordinary noises of the night, nor, with the lighted lamp beside her, could she see clearly anything that lay in the forest beyond. But Beatrice could guess, as surely as though she stood in the moonlight beside John Herrick, just how distinct before his eyes was the lighted window with his sister

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

sitting beside it. She could imagine, even, just what that picture must mean to him, the glowing, shaded lamp, the cushioned chair, the quiet beauty of Aunt Anna's profile. How they must all stand for home and familiar things, for the unswerving affection of those of his own blood. He must know, surely, why his sister had come there, what she was waiting for as she sat, unconscious and serene, beside the window. He had only to lift his voice ever so little above the whispers of the forest; he had only to speak her name and the long spell would be broken. Beatrice held her breath to listen. There was no sound.

He stood, staring up at the window for a long, long time; then turned upon his heel at last. Beatrice could actually hear the harsh grating of his heavy boot upon a stone as he did so. She heard the jingling of the curb as he loosed his horse; she heard the creak of the stirrup leather and the scramble of iron-shod



He had only to lift his voice and the long spell would be broken

A DECISION

'feet as he swung into the saddle and was off. There was no hesitation or stopping to look back; it was as though he had come to a final decision. Beatrice felt that there was something very ominous, something dismaying in the steadily diminishing thud, thud, of the hoof-beats, as horse and rider drew away into the darkness. With a long sigh she turned, shivering, from the window and buried her face in the pillow.

Christina came up the hill to see them next day, a radiant Christina who had learned that she need no longer keep secret from her friends her joy in Olaf's return. The promise of the brilliant moonlight had not been fulfilled in the morning's weather, for deluges of rain were falling, sluicing down the steep roof, dripping from the trees, and swelling the stream until the sound of the waterfall filled the whole house. No amount of rain could quench the Finnish woman's happiness, how-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

ever, as she stood in the kitchen, her garments soaked and her face beaming.

“It seemed so wrong to keep the good news from you, when it was really through Miss Beatrice that Olaf came home. I would never have dared to ask any one to write to him in the face of Thorvik’s forbidding it. Olaf came very early one morning, when Thorvik happened to be away for the night, and we went straight up to see John Herrick, for he was always the best friend my boy had. He made Olaf promise that he would not show himself in the village, and I know myself that it is wise that he should keep away after that business at Mason’s Bluff, but it is hard for me to see so little of him.”

Of her son’s adventure with the bear she made very light indeed.

“He did nothing more than he should,” she declared. “Of course, he might have been hurt, but there was that dear Miss Nancy; think what might have come to her!”

A DECISION

Her presence in the kitchen was very welcome, for Nancy's arm was too stiff to be of much service, and Beatrice admitted frankly that as cook she was a sorry substitute.

"Willing but awkward, I would describe myself if I were advertising for a situation," she told them. "Nancy has a special talent for cooking, but I have a genius for breaking dishes and scalding myself."

Christina, therefore, stayed to cook the dinner and to bake a second edition of the cake upon which misfortune had fallen yesterday. Olaf came across the hill through the rain and sat for long in the kitchen with his mother, making her the most peaceful and uninterrupted visit that had been possible since his return. Nancy, going in and out on various errands, heard snatches of tales of the high seas, of whales and hurricanes, of hot foreign ports baking in the tropical sun, of winds that cut you like a knife as you slid across the slippery decks with great waves washing over you, of

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the longing for the land and home, and also—Olaf came to it slowly—of the restless desire that grows and grows, of the sailor on leave to be at sea again.

“Ah, but you would n’t go just yet!” cried Christina in alarm.

“No, not just yet. John Herrick has been so kind to me that I feel like standing by him in—in something that he has on hand just now.” But Olaf leaned back in his chair and looked out through the blurred windows as though he were already impatient to be off.

They were an oddly assorted pair, he so tall, straight, and American, she, despite her ordinary clothes and her careful English, so foreign still. Beatrice thought so, as she came into the kitchen in the late afternoon, and found them both making preparations to depart. The day had been a long and heavy one to her. Her mind was full of what she had seen the night before, although she had not yet had time to discuss it in private with

A DECISION

Nancy. She longed to ride over to the Hericks' house, for what purpose she could not herself say. The pouring rain, however, made such an expedition so unreasonable that she could not, in the whole course of the day, think of an excuse urgent enough to explain her going.

"I wish you were not going to be so wet," she said to Christina. "You will be soaked again before you get home."

"It is not raining so much now," Olaf observed, reaching for his cap that lay on the window-sill, "it will soon—"

He interrupted himself suddenly and turned round to them with a delighted grin. He spoke softly and jerked his head toward the window where, to Beatrice's astonishment, she saw dimly through the wet pane that a face was peering in. The close-set eyes and ungainly nose showed that it was Dabney Mills.

"I never knew before just what the word eavesdropper meant," said Olaf. "Think how

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the water must be pouring off the roof and running down that fellow's neck!"

Seeing that he had been observed, Dabney came to the door and a moment later stood, a bedraggled and dejected figure, just inside the threshold.

"I was looking in to see if there was any one at home," he tried to explain, while Olaf supplemented:

"On such a fine day he was afraid you might all be out."

"I went up the mountain to see if I could get back my note-book," Dabney went on to account for his forlorn condition. "I have been looking for hours, but I could n't find it."

"Maybe the bear put it in her pocket and went away with it," suggested Christina flip-pantly. "Anyway, it would be soaked to a pulp by this time."

"You need n't worry, I picked it up last night when I went back to get the milk-can," Olaf said. He brought the familiar leather-

A DECISION

covered book from an inside pocket and held it out to its owner. A wicked twinkle that he could not suppress seemed to fill Dabney Mills with panic-stricken suspicion.

"You've been reading it," he cried. "You had no right. You have been prying into my private affairs."

The other boy's face flushed with anger.

"It may be I have n't been brought up a gentleman like you," he returned hotly. "But I would n't be peering and prying into other people's business for all that. Whatever mean secrets you have hid away in that book, they are there still, safe and sound. All I did was to write a page at the end. I was afraid that if you did n't have an account of that bear business at once, you might forget just how it happened."

Dabney snatched the book and nervously turned to the last page. Beatrice was so close that she could not help seeing that it was covered with Olaf's square schoolboy writing.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

The last sentence caught her eye, giving a clue to the rest.

“Even though our hero took the precaution of getting behind the lady who was with him, he did not escape entirely unharmed.”

Dabney thrust the book into his pocket and shot Olaf a glance of wicked rage.

“I am very much obliged to you,” he said. “You shall hear of my gratitude later. I know more about you than you think, young man.”

He went out into the rain, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER X

DABNEY'S CLUE

IT was still raining next morning, which was, as Aunt Anna said, "a merciful providence, considering how much mending there is to do, and how little we stay indoors to do it on a bright day."

They sat around the fire talking and sewing busily, for it was true that much had been neglected in the enjoyment of other things. Beatrice, the least enthusiastic seamstress of the three, was the one whose wardrobe needed the most repair, since her scrambles over the mountains had wrought more ruin than she had realized. If Aunt Anna had not mended the rent in her riding skirt and Nancy had not sewed up the rip in her sheepskin coat, she would never have come to the end.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"I seem to have strewed the whole State of Montana over with buttons," she declared with a sigh, "but, oh, how much I have seen while I have been doing it! If it is still raining to-morrow, I think Buck will kick out the side of his stall, he is so impatient to be off again, and so am I."

There was a promise of clearing at sunset, for the clouds began to lift, and patches of blue sky showed to the westward, a hopeful sign for the morrow. The peak of Gray Cloud Mountain, visible from their doorstep, loomed through the mist that had shrouded it from view and before dark showed its towering outline, clear-cut against the clouds. And never, never, so Beatrice and Nancy thought, had they seen a more glorious day than the morrow turned out to be. With the whole world washed clean, with the dripping water dried up in an hour by the all-conquering sunshine, it seemed that nothing could be more perfect.

DABNEY'S CLUE

Before they had finished breakfast, there was a loud trampling of hoofs outside, announcing a cavalcade—Hester Herrick on her pinto pony, Dr. Minturn with her, and Olaf riding behind leading a packhorse.

“It is the day of all days for a picnic,” Hester announced. “All the time you have been here, we have talked of going to Eagle Rock, and you promised to come with me the first day I could arrange it. Christina will spend the day with Miss Deems, this horse that Olaf is on will do for Nancy to ride; and everything we could possibly need is packed on old Martha here. Dr. Minturn rode by our house this morning, and thought he would come over with me; though he is in a hurry to get to the village. He will come back this evening after we have got home to make your aunt a real, proper visit. Do say you will come.”

Her eagerness and the inviting beauty of the day were not to be denied, so that in a

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

moment Nancy and Beatrice were running to and fro in hasty preparation.

"Bring warm coats and your swimming suits and hurry," Hester directed. "Olaf will saddle Buck while you are getting ready."

It was well that Olaf was there to deal with Beatrice's pony, for with the gathered energy of two days' vacation, Buck went through all the tricks in his repertoire during the cinching of the saddle. He was off down the trail like an arrow the moment his mistress was in the saddle, leaving the others trailing far behind. They came together soon, however, and climbed merrily upward, looking back at the valley mapped out below them and at the bare, brown slopes of the range opposite. They looked so near in the clear air that Beatrice shouted, "to see if there would be an echo."

"Hardly," commented Hester, "for they are twenty miles away."

Beatrice tried many times, as they went along, to think of some question to put to

DABNEY'S CLUE

Hester that might bring forth information about John Herrick, but no matter how often she led up to it, she was never able to think what to say. She had told Nancy of that strange scene in the moonlight, and she was afraid now of her sister's blunt frankness, should the talk touch upon that matter of which both their minds were so full. In the end, therefore, she said nothing.

They reached Eagle Rock well before noon, unsaddled their horses, removed the generous bundles of lunch from the back of the willing pack-pony, and turned all four out to graze. Above them rose abruptly a huge gray mass of granite, set in the midst of a smooth slope of grass and scrubby trees. A clear stream swept in a curve below the foot of the rock, spread to a broad pool, and then ran babbling out of sight among the trees. Hester, who was, in her own sphere, a capable and self-reliant young person, showed them how to hobble the horses lest they stray too far, how

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

to build a fireplace of stones with its back to the wind, and then brought out her fishing tackle and set about teaching the two girls how to catch rainbow trout.

Beatrice succeeded very badly, displaying a great talent for tangling her hook in the bushes when she tried to learn to cast. She laid down her rod after a little, stretched herself upon her back on the warm grass, and fell to watching the fleet of towering white clouds that went drifting overhead. One of them, which looked even more than the others like a tall vessel with curved and shining sails, had come to grief on the jagged shoulder of Gray Cloud Mountain and hung there, beating itself to pieces, growing thinner and thinner as it spread out in long wreaths across the glowing blue sky. Some of Beatrice's cares and worries seemed to be fading from her mind in much the same way, blown afar by the brisk, warm gusts of wind.

"I believe everything will come out right

DABNEY'S CLUE

after all," she thought, "and I shall know, when the time comes, what I ought to do."

She got up at last and went to join the others, who greeted her with reproaches for having made so little effort to catch any fish.

Nancy, more patient and painstaking, had come into better fortune. She had learned to cast, after a fashion, and had managed to dangle her gay-colored fly in the water at the edge of a riffle just as Hester had instructed her. Then came the first tug at her line, a magic quiver which seemed to send an electric shock of excitement all up her arm. In that second she became a fisherman.

They landed twelve trout between them, although Hester's share was by far the greater, and they ate all twelve for the lunch that they spread on a flat, sun-warmed shelf of Eagle Rock. Such a feast as it was, with sizzling fried bacon, toasted cheese sandwiches, hot cocoa, and the trout cooked to a turn by Hester. Afterward they sat and talked for a

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

very long time, talked of everything and of nothing, until Hester jumped up and said there was only just time for a swim before going home.

"I did not know," said Nancy a little doubtfully, "that swimming was one of the usual sports in the Rocky Mountains."

"Most of the water is too cold to be pleasant," replied Hester, "but this pool is warm enough. It is the only one I know of. Roddy found it long ago, and taught me to swim here. He says perhaps it was beavers that helped to dam it and went away years before we discovered it. The stream is fed by melted snow, like all the others, but it runs very shallow for miles above here, out in the open where the sun can warm it. By mid-afternoon, like this, it is not cold at all."

She donned her bathing suit and dropped into the water with a splash. After a moment of doubt and hesitation, her two friends followed.

DABNEY'S CLUE

"Oh!" cried Beatrice and "Oh," echoed Nancy, "I did not know it would be like this!"

A person who has never bathed in the clear, rock pools of the high mountainsides cannot know what real exhilaration is. The two girls caught their breath with delight and wonder, with a pleasure that was quite indescribable. To plunge into the crystal-blue water, to know that it has poured down from the vast glaciers and great, empty snow-fields where no human foot ever comes, to feel all the tingling freshness of the water without its deadly cold—there are few things like it in the world. The girls laughed and splashed and swam and floated until Hester warned them that it was not wise to stay in too long, and they came out reluctantly to dry themselves in the sun.

They scrambled almost to the top of Eagle Rock, found a shelf that was sheltered from the wind, and sat down in a row, swinging their feet over the void beneath and looking

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

out over the long ranges of hills and mountains, brown, russet, red, and chrome-yellow, fading to the blue peaks in the far distance.

“That must be a mountain sheep, that dot moving there opposite us,” Hester observed. “And you can see Gray Cloud Pass over beyond the shoulder of this nearest hill. The tuft of green above is that stretch of woods growing around the lake, but see how bare the slope is where it goes up beyond—nothing but solid rock and overhanging cliffs to the very top. There is a little trail that picks its way back and forth over the face of the mountain; it is called Dead Man’s Mile, there is so much danger, just there, from unsteady footing and rocks falling from above.”

Beatrice remembered how she had come to grief even on the lower, easier slope, and shuddered at the thought of the difficulties higher up.

“Yet I should like to climb it,” she thought.

DABNEY'S CLUE

The very impossibility of the idea made it seem all the more inviting.

They sat there even after they were dry, but finally Hester, with a sigh, declared they must go.

"It has been such a pleasant day," she said, "I hate to have it end. We—we are n't very happy at home, just now, Roddy and I."

"What!" exclaimed Nancy. "What can be the matter?"

"I don't know," Hester answered hopelessly. "I really brought you here so that we could talk about it, but it has been so hard to speak that I have n't said anything, and now it is time to go home. Long ago Roddy used to be like this sometimes. He would look worried and troubled for days and at last would go off, camping in the hills, hunting and fishing and thinking things out, and he would come home quite cheerful again. That was long, long past; I had almost forgotten it, but now it has all come back again. He is

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

miserable and restless, and troubled over something I can't understand. Just last night he asked me the strangest thing. He wanted to know if I could be happy in some other place if he decided not to live here any longer. And I had thought he loved Gray Cloud Mountain best of any place in the world!"

If John Herrick did not tell her his secret, they had no right to do so. Such was the unspoken message that passed between the sisters as Nancy tried to offer comfort, with very little success.

"I suppose there is no use in talking of it," said little Hester at last with a sigh. "Things may be better some time. Well, we must be going home. Climb down, and I will show you how to throw the diamond hitch on a pack-horse."

The ride home was less hilarious than their setting out had been, and Beatrice and Nancy went up the path to the cabin with no very light hearts. In the evening, however, they

DABNEY'S CLUE

were made happy again by a visit from Dr. Minturn and his very good report of Aunt Anna.

"I could not ask for anything better," he declared, fully as delighted as were they. The beaming warmth of his smile seemed to light the whole room.

"I have something to propose," he went on. "Nancy here has come to be more of a rider than she was when I visited you before, and I have been wondering if she would go over the pass with me to-morrow and spend a few days with Miriam. Mrs. Minturn has asked me over and over again if she could n't learn to know both the girls, and this is a good chance. Beatrice can ride over to come back with her, since she should not go over the trail alone."

It was difficult to persuade Nancy to leave her housekeeping, but arguments prevailed at last and she set off next morning, with many last messages and instructions to Beatrice, and with a great deal of pleasure and excitement

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

shining in her eyes. John Herrick had sent over the same horse she had ridden yesterday, a gentle creature on which she was more comfortable than when mounted upon the gay spirited Buck. Beatrice was to follow in three days to come back with her. The house seemed very empty without her busy presence, and Olaf, when he came with the milk, declared that nothing was the same at all with Miss Nancy gone.

“And things are n’t very cheerful where I live, either,” he said. “Miss Hester has been crying, and that Dabney Mills has been hanging around the place. He brings no good with him, whatever he comes for.”

Beatrice was not inclined to take the amateur detective very seriously; but, she was concerned indeed to hear that Hester was still unhappy. She was desirous of riding over to see her, but her unpractised skill as a housewife made it difficult for her to find a spare

DABNEY'S CLUE

moment. Most of the next day passed without her having time for visiting, but when evening came she was ordered by Aunt Anna to go out for a little, since she had toiled in the house all day. As there was not time enough for a ride, she strolled down the path under the pines and stood at the bars of the gate, watching the slow tide of shadows creep up the hillsides opposite. For so long a time did she stand there that when two figures came down the hill from the direction of John Herrick's house it was too dark to see who they were, and they were only to be recognized by their voices. The loudness of their speech indicated that neither Olaf nor Dabney Mills was in a friendly mood.

"We give you warning," Olaf was saying, "that you are not to come on John Herrick's place again. You are to ask no more questions of anybody. You are to put that note-book in your pocket and shut your mouth and get

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

out. If you show yourself here again, you will get something that will make what you took from the bear seem like a love-pat."

"You warn me? Who are you, giving orders?" Dabney Mills thrust his face forward sharply and spoke almost into the other's. "Who *are* you? That's what I'm asking?"

Olaf hesitated, then swung about without replying and strode off up the hill.

"Imposter!" cried Dabney after him. "Liar!" He caught sight suddenly of Beatrice beside the gate and changed his manner quickly.

"Good evening," he said pleasantly, "might I ask——"

He had glanced upward toward Olaf, disappearing in the dusk, so that Beatrice guessed the question concerned him, and interrupted.

"There is no use in your asking me anything," she said. "We are all very tired of your questions, and think you have no right to ask them."

DABNEY'S CLUE

"Oh, I don't want to inquire about him," returned Dabney, indicating Olaf with a jerk of his thumb. "I know who he is all right—Christina's boy that went off to sea, and that has such a warm welcome waiting for him in Ely. I found out who he was the day the bear knocked me out. I came to and saw him hanging over that precipice and I knew, all in a minute, that only a sailor could have the head to do such a thing. I had my suspicions before, and I only needed that to make me sure."

"If you tell about him in the village," said Beatrice, growing rather indiscreet in the defense of Olaf, "he may have something to tell about you and my sister and the bear."

"Oh, I don't care to talk very much about him for a while," Dabney declared hastily. "It's another person I have my eye on—bigger game than Olaf Jensen. I'm trying to find out who took that money and broke up the

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

work down in Ely. And I've about found out, too."

He gave her a long meaning look and turned away.

"Wait!" cried Beatrice. "You don't mean that you think Olaf——" She could not go on.

"What's he hanging around here for, afraid to show himself and afraid to go away? Oh, he's in it all right; he may even have done the actual stealing, but not just for himself. There's some one else involved—some one higher up. I'll soon be able to tell who took the company's money and wrecked the whole project."

"Who?" the question broke from Beatrice in a cry of anger, but she felt also a sickening dread and foreboding of what his answer would be.

"Oh, I'm not telling—yet," he replied, quite restored to his usual impudent calm. "He's a fellow that it will be hard to prove anything

DABNEY'S CLUE

against. Most people, even the laborers, talk pretty well of him, and nobody knows anything to his discredit. Nobody knows very much about him at all, as far as I can make out. But I've got my proofs all lined up and with just a little more——”

“Who?” cried Beatrice desperately again.

Dabney Mills merely jerked his thumb toward where the lights of John Herrick's house were shining among the trees. Even as they looked up, the door opened, showing, silhouetted against the light within, Hester and John Herrick standing on the threshold. He turned as though to bid her good-by, then strode down the steps without looking back. She stood, however, with the door still open and the light streaming out, so that they could see him mount his horse and ride away up the trail into the mountains.

“Yes,” said Dabney, “that's the one.”

But Beatrice did not answer.

CHAPTER XI

OVER THE PASS

THROUGH all the night following Dabney Mills' veiled accusation of John Herrick, Beatrice slept very little. A tireless procession of thoughts went trooping through her weary mind: Aunt Anna's story of her brother, that strange vision of John Herrick walking back and forth in the moonlight, the sight of his departure. What did all these things mean in the end? Perhaps John Herrick had gone away forever, perhaps Dabney Mills had real proofs of—no, no that could not be! Come what might, she would never believe anything against John Herrick. It was a help, at least, to think that next day she was to go over the pass to bring Nancy back, and that she could ask the advice of Dr. Min-

OVER THE PASS

turn. He alone could be trusted with knowledge of both sides of the affair; he would give her counsel from a wise and friendly heart. The comfort of this thought brought her sleep at last.

As early as she could make ready, she set off next morning. She stopped for a minute at the door of the Herrick's house, hoping to hear that she had been mistaken in her understanding of what she had seen. But no, Hester met her at the door with heavy eyes and told her that John Herrick had gone away very suddenly, "soon after that horrid boy, Dabney Mills, had been here. He took his tent and quite a supply of food. He may have been planning to camp several days, but he did n't tell me where or why. He just said, 'so-long Hester; better luck by and by,' and galloped away."

Much disheartened, Beatrice turned her horse's head to the trail and began to mount steadily the zigzag path that led to Gray

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

Cloud Pass. The way had grown familiar now, so that instead of looking out at the wide panorama of mountains or gazing ahead to search out the trail, she was free to observe smaller things: a hollow tree with an owl's nest in it from which a red-brown head with inquisitive round eyes was thrust to watch her pass; the busy little gophers that popped in and out of their holes at her approach, consumed by both curiosity and alarm; the awkward, unhurried porcupine that crossed the trail ahead of her and disappeared into the brush. She knew well that the forest about her must be alive with tiny, bright eyes and sharp, peering little faces, but she had neither time nor patience to watch for them. So full was she of surging hopes and desires, her one idea was to push forward. To seek advice, find out what was the best thing to do, and then do it—those were the only things that would bring her peace of mind.

The day was not so clear as yesterday had

OVER THE PASS

been. The sun shone with less warmth, even as noon approached, the hills were dun-color and the far mountains purple instead of blue. Beatrice was not weather-wise enough to know just what such conditions meant, nor could she have hurried forward more impatiently if she had. Even the willing Buck finally protested against the haste she demanded of him and refused to increase his speed even when she touched him with the whip.

There was a certain level stretch of ground that she remembered, a nook between two rocks, with the stream splashing below. She was determined to reach this spot before she stopped to eat her lunch, although noon had passed and she was beginning to be hungry. She finally came up the last rise of the steep path, breathless with haste, and did not observe the curl of blue smoke that was going up from behind the rocks. Dismounting, and with Buck's bridle over her arm, she turned the corner of the wall of rock to find her picnic

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

ground occupied. A little fire was burning between two stones, a string of trout hung before it, and a slim black mare grazed lazily beside the mountain wall. The man who turned to greet her was John Herrick.

Her mind had been so full of thoughts of him that for a moment it seemed impossible to speak to him naturally. He also stood, surprised and nonplussed, apparently unable to utter a word. He took Buck's bridle from her at last and, still in silence, loosened the girths, lifted off the saddle, and let the horse roll luxuriously on the grass.

"You have ridden him too hard," he said at length, looking at Buck's wet sides and wide nostrils. "Not even a mountain-bred pony can stand such a pace. Why, did you hurry so? Was there anything the matter?"

"N-no," replied Beatrice doubtfully. She could not have told him why she had been in such impatient haste; perhaps she could not even explain it to herself. Certainly she was

OVER THE PASS

in no hurry to go forward now, but knelt down by the fire and fell to turning the trout, while he picketed her horse and spread a blanket for her to sit on. As she looked up to thank him she saw that the heavy cloud that had been visible on his face when she first saw him was lifted now, making him look his smiling, cheerful self again. It was as though her chance coming had done him good.

The picnic yesterday had been merry, but this one, somehow seemed gayer still. They joked and laughed as they shared in the preparations; he tried to teach her how to make flapjacks and laughed at her awkwardness when she attempted to toss them; she criticized his method of boiling coffee and made him admit that hers was better. As they sat eating he told her tales of past camping adventures; how he had once crawled into a cavern under a cliff to take shelter from the rain and had discovered that it was the home of a most unamiable mountain lion; how, in his tent, far up on

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

Gray Cloud Mountain, a grizzly bear cub had slipped under the canvas and invited itself to share his bed.

“And I had to be polite to the pushing, grunting little beast,” he said, “for its mother and my rifle were both outside.”

After they had finished their lunch they still sat lazily by the fire, watching the thin smoke drift far across the depths below them until it lost itself in the distant blue haze. Beatrice was leaning against the warm rock while her companion sat upright, his clear-cut profile showing against the vast blue sky.

“He looks hardly more than just grown up, when he talks and laughs like that,” was her inward reflection. It seemed as though he had dropped the burden that had been so heavy all these years, and, in this hour of friendliness, had gone back to the boyhood he had cast from him.

He was pointing out to her the wide, dry lands of Broken Bow Valley, which, with ir-

OVER THE PASS

rigation, were some day to be orchards and meadows and rich farming land instead of a broad waste, polka-dotted with sage-brush. At some length he told of the difficulty in getting the irrigation project started, of how long it had taken to form a company and to get construction under way. But of one thing he did not speak, of the interruption in the work, of the threatened strike and the disappearance of the company's funds. Beatrice waited, hoping that he would let fall some explanation, throw some light on that mystery, and refute forever the dismaying suspicions of Dabney Mills. Of that phase of the matter, however, he said no single word.

"When it is all finished and the valley is prosperous," he said, "you must be careful when sharp traders try to buy your cabin from you, or make bids for your big pines. You must not part with them at once."

"I think I could never part with them," she

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

assured him. "I did not know how much I could learn to love the woods and the cabin and the mountains."

He sat for a little while, looking across to where the shadows of clouds moved, one by one, across the dark slopes of the range opposite.

"They are friendly things, these mountains," he observed. "They stand by you when you are in trouble, somehow, they are so big and calm and untroubled themselves."

Their friendship and confidence had brought them so close together that Beatrice felt suddenly the thrill of a bold impulse. She cast aside Dr. Minturn's advice to let John Herrick make the first move toward reconciliation. It did not occur to her that the man beside her might be talking so freely only because he meant so soon to close his friendship to her forever. She reflected only on how triumphant she would be when her management had brought the whole misunderstanding to a

OVER THE PASS

happy end. Yet she did not dare speak out at once.

"Only think," she began suddenly, "that you and I might be lunching at—at the Manhattan together if things had been a little different."

"Yes." She was greatly encouraged by his immediate assent. He looked at his gray flannel shirt and at her patched riding skirt and went on. "We wouldn't be dressed just as we are now, would we? And there would be music, instead of the sound of a stream, and a hundred voices talking all at once, instead of those two magpies chattering in the thicket. The fat lady at the next table—there always is one—might be wearing a beaver scarf made from the jacket of some furry little fellow that swam in that very pool below us, and the waiter might tell us that there was an unusual delicacy to-day—rainbow trout."

She leaned forward, feeling bolder still.

"You have n't forgotten," she said, "and you

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

will be coming back to it all some day. We know who you are. We want so much to have you belong to us again. Are n't you coming back?"

"You know?"

He stood up suddenly and faced her. In that instant she knew that she had done wrong. The shadow of unforgettable pain swept over his face and the laughter died in his eyes.

"You know?" he repeated.

She did not trust herself to speak or even to look at him. Mutely she nodded keeping her wide, unseeing eyes on the fire, clenching her hands, holding her breath and waiting. There was a long, long pause.

He moved at last, strode to the fire and trod out the flames and the smouldering coals with his big boots.

"It is time we were going on," he said. "You must reach Dr. Minturn's before dark and I have none too much daylight left to climb my own trail."

OVER THE PASS

Helplessly she stood watching while he caught the horses and saddled them. The black one yielded quietly enough, but Buck, according to his usual habit, filled the whole rock-walled space with his plunging and rearing, a small but spirited sample of the Wild West. He had to yield at last, however and was led to where his mistress was waiting. John Herrick's hat was off and his fair hair was ruffled by the wind and by his struggles with the reluctant pony. Beatrice noticed as never before how like he was to Aunt Anna. Since she had done so much harm already, she felt she might make one more effort.

"Are n't you coming back " she questioned desperately.

"No," he answered, "I am never coming back."

He swung into the saddle and, with a great rattling of stones dislodged by the pony's hoofs, he was off up the steep trail. It might

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

have been that he looked back, once, to see a bright-haired girl hide her face in her arm and bow her head against the rock, while a white-nosed pony nuzzled her shoulder in vain effort to offer comfort. But if John Herrick looked back he paid no heed.

CHAPTER XII

DEAD MAN'S MILE

IT was comfort rather than advice that a very weary and dispirited Beatrice needed when at last she arrived at Dr. Minturn's house. She greeted the rosy, laughing Nancy with much enthusiasm, for the sisters had missed each other sorely; but she was impatient for the moment when she could talk over their whole affair with the kindly doctor. After supper, accordingly, he sat, on the grassy bank in the moonlight, with a girl on each side of him, and listened gravely to all that Beatrice, with occasional additions from Nancy, had to say. It was not easy for her to confess what harm she had done by her impulsive and overconfident words, but she told her story bravely to the end.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

"There is no use in the world," the doctor commented cheerfully, "in spending time in vain remorse. We should decide what must be done now. It may be, the only thing is to wait."

Beatrice drew a deep quivering sigh. It seemed, in the midst of excitement and the anxiety to atone, that waiting was the one intolerable thing.

"I can't bear to wait," she burst out at last.

"I have never told you," Dr. Minturn rejoined slowly, "of how Miriam and I came to live here. We used to be in a big city and we had that same full, restless life that most city dwellers know. Some people thrive in such an atmosphere, some can endure it, but it was destruction to us both. I had more patients than I could care for, Miriam's days were as crowded as mine. We saw each other little and were always tired when our daily duties were done. I realized vaguely that such unceasing toil must kill any man before long, but

DEAD MAN'S MILE

the excitement of my growing practice was something I could not give up. Then Miriam, one day, asked me some questions; she knew some one who had such and such symptoms, who felt this way during the smoky winter and that way when the air was damp and the wind was raw. I was in haste and my verdict was quick. 'Such a person could not live a year,' I declared. And then she told me the person was herself!"

He paused to look down at the quiet house under the trees, where Miriam's shadow showed on one white curtain after another as she went to and fro about her work. For a minute he watched as though to assure himself that the memory of that terrible day was only a dream.

"It is something we all have to learn; how to watch our whole, secure, happy world fall to pieces before our eyes, and still keep our minds clear and be able to think what to do. 'A change of climate,' my fellow-doctors ad-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

vised; 'Quiet, rest, no anxiety'; but they all shook their heads. We tried place after place, it would be too long a story to tell how we drifted here at last. The cottage was only half its size, then, but it was habitable; the place seemed good as any; and neither of us had the heart to go farther. The wrench of leaving the old life, the weariness of wandering from place to place had all done harm; and the good effect of the change had not yet come. Miriam was always cheerful, always hopeful, but I watched her grow thinner and weaker every day. I stood by, helpless. There was nothing to do but wait, though it seemed that waiting must drive me mad."

Beatrice nodded understandingly. Waiting—how she hated it! It seemed as though there must always be something to do other than to wait; but it was likely to be the wrong thing.

"There was one morning when I had been watching beside her bed all night, thinking, as she slept, how pinched and thin and shadowy

DEAD MAN'S MILE

she had grown. We were young then, if you can think of us as that, young like your Aunt Anna and John Herrick, with years to dream of still before us. And that night it seemed as though it all was coming to an end. I can remember how the dawn came in at the windows and how Miriam opened her eyes to look up at me and smile. I believe she was thinking that she would rather die here in the clean, empty quiet than in that roaring, smoke-filled town that we called home.

“But it was no place of peace for me. I called the nurse and flung myself out of the house; I tramped away up the mountain, crushing the roses and forget-me-nots under foot with a savage pleasure that I can still recall. I stood on the highest ridge at last, looked out over the valley and the dark hills with their summits bathed in sunshine, at the winding silver thread of the river, and I held up my arms and opened my lips to curse them all.

THE HILL 'OF ADVENTURE

“The words I meant to say were never spoken. I heard a footstep on the trail behind me and, as I looked around, a man passed by me and went down the mountain. He was old, far older than I am now, his face was so weather-beaten, his long hair so grizzled, and his back so bent that he might have passed for Father Time himself. He said no word, but he gave me one look that seemed to read every thought within me, a glance of complete and utter scorn. Some old prospector he was, a man who had spent his life trudging over the barren hillsides, looking for new mines, disappointed a thousand times, seeking fortune and never finding it. Others who followed him had prospered by his discoveries, had found the riches that he could not keep; for the man who prospects is seldom the man who gathers wealth. He gathers other things, however; forbearance, understandings, and a strange, deep patience, born of lonely valleys, endless trails, and wide starry skies. It was no won-

DEAD MAN'S MILE

der he scorned me and my pitiful little anger with the mountains he called his.

"I never saw him again. He stepped into my life and out of it again, and we did not even exchange a word. Yet I have never forgotten the lesson his one look taught me. I went down the hill after a little, and the nurse met me at the door.

" 'I thought you would never come,' she said. 'I have been thinking for days that there was a little change, and now I am sure of it.'

"Yes, the broad daylight showed it: the flame of Miriam's life was burning a little brighter; the mountain air was beginning to do its work at last. In a week she could sit up; in a month she could walk about; and in a year she was well."

"And you never went home again?" Nancy asked, when a pause marked the end of his tale.

"Home was here now, and we had no wish to go back to a life that had so nearly been the

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

end of both of us. For a time there was no doctor in the valley below us here, so I used to do what I could for the sick people in these mountains. My place at home was soon filled; the tasks I had left went on without me. By and by a younger man moved into this valley to take the work, so that I was free to try that experiment that I had long thought of—what Miriam calls my Christmas-tree Garden. I have helped again when there were epidemics in the valley and when our doctor went to war; but I am always glad to lay the burden down and come back to my trees. And the point of all my long story is, my dear, that some time in the course of our growing up, we must learn how to wait. To be eager and ardent is part of being young, but to learn that eagerness does not bring all things is a truth that the years bring us.”

He made a gesture toward the summit of Gray Cloud Mountain, a black mass against the twinkling stars.

DEAD MAN'S MILE

"He is learning his lesson, too, that boy up there, camping in the dark and the silence, thinking it all out, coming nearer and nearer to the truth of things at last."

"Do you—oh, do you think that he might change and come back to us in the end?" cried Beatrice in eager hope.

"I believe so. And when the time comes to act, you will know what to do."

A very sleepy and comforted girl was tucked into bed by the doctor's wife—a young person who thought she could not sleep on account of her many anxieties, but who was lost in slumber almost before the door was closed. She did not even hear the storm of wind and rain that swept over the cottage in the night, but awoke in the morning to see the sun shining, and to hear a camp-robber jay calling so loudly from the nearest tree that she could sleep no longer.

"Your horse is not fit to go back for a day or two," Dr. Minturn said at breakfast. "You

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

pushed him too hard when you climbed the pass, and you should leave him here to rest. I will lend you my brown Presto. He is not such a pony as Buck, I admit, but he will carry you safely enough. You can come back for your horse later, or I will send him over the range as soon as some one passes."

The sun was high when she and Nancy set out together, shining above the pass as they mounted upward.

"But there is something the matter with it," Beatrice declared to her sister; "there does n't seem to be any warmth in it, somehow." And she shivered a little.

An unusual haze seemed to hang like a blanket between them and the sun, and the air held a strange chill. Even when wrapped in their warm coats, the two girls felt cold as they climbed to the summit of the pass and began the descent on the other side. Beatrice said very little, so busy was her mind with many

DEAD MAN'S MILE

difficult problems. Must she tell Aunt Anna what had happened, and let her know that all hopes of meeting her brother were at an end? Would John Herrick's house soon be closed, and would Hester have to leave them too?

Would it be of any use—Good heavens! what was that lying beside the trail? Something huge, dark, and unwieldy was stretched out among the bushes: it was a black horse, apparently dead. They both knew those white feet and the brand on the flank. It was John Herrick's black mare, Dolly.

They dismounted, while the poor creature opened its eyes and managed to raise its head. A horse that is so injured that it cannot get up when a person comes near is sorely hurt indeed. That much Beatrice knew, yet was powerless to discover what was the matter. By some intuition Nancy guessed one thing, at least, that was needed, for she ran to the stream, filled her felt hat with water, and

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

brought it back, spilling and dripping, but with enough left for the poor animal to drink gratefully.

"I wish you could speak," Beatrice said helplessly, as the mare laid her head down again. Presto nudged her inquiringly with his nose, but she did not move.

They observed as they stood looking at her, that the bridle was half torn off—that the big saddle, with broken cantle, was twisted all to one side by the pony's fall. On the face of the mountain wall above them they could trace Dolly's disastrous course in trampled bushes, weeds torn up by the roots, gouges in the rocky soil where she had slid and rolled and struggled to regain her footing. But look where they might, they could see no sign of John Herrick.

"When the time comes to act, you will know what to do."

So Dr. Minturn had said, and he had been right. Beatrice knew well that now was the

DEAD MAN'S MILE

moment for action, not waiting; and she felt her mind surprisingly calm and cool. They must follow the spidery line of trail that zigzagged back and forth over the precipitous mountain-side, and find the spot, high above, from which the black mare had fallen.

"You wait here, Nancy," she ordered, but she heard the other horse's hoofs pattering behind her even as she turned. It was useless to try to make Nancy stay behind. What was it Hester had said that way was called—that tiny path that crawled out upon the smooth face of the rock wall? It was Dead Man's Mile.

There were moments when the brown pony slipped, moments when the vast depths below made both the girls so giddy that they were forced to shut their eyes. A big stone rolled under Presto's foot and he drew back only just in time to keep from plunging after it. Beatrice tried not to watch it, but she could not keep her eyes away as it slid and bounded in

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

longer and longer leaps until finally it disappeared into the woods below.

"Are you safe, Nancy?" she called. She did not dare look back.

"Yes," came the reply, rather unsteadily, from Nancy close behind.

Up and up they went. It seemed as though they would remember for all their lives every treacherous inch of that trail along which they crawled as a fly crawls crookedly up a window-pane, and yet that they would never be able to find their way down again. Up and up—and there suddenly was John Herrick, lying on a narrow shelf of rock just below them, his white face turned upward to the sky, and the stones and tufts of grass about him stained with blood. Just ahead, at the turn of the trail, they could see his little tent, his various belongings heaped together, and the aimless, drifting smoke of his still smoldering camp fire.

Before Nancy could even cry out, Beatrice was down from her horse, down from the trail,

DEAD MAN'S MILE

and was kneeling beside him. A gash across the forehead was his most evident injury, but that could not account for all this blood. No, here on the under side of his arm, where the sleeve of his coat was torn away, this was the deeper wound from which had poured forth that crimson deluge that had soaked his clothes and stained the ground under him. Thanks to instructions that she had received long before, she knew what to do. But could she be quick enough? Might she not be too late? As she twisted her handkerchief, she tried to remember just what she had been told, where the knot was to come, just which spot was the proper one for the pressure.

Those first-aid lectures—it was only because every one else was going to them that she had attended at all. And she was rather bored by the time she had reached the third one, and prone to let her mind wander. With maddening clearness, she could recollect how she had looked out of the window, glanced at one girl's

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

hair-ribbon, decided she would have a dress like the one in front of her, and with only half her mind had listened to what the lecturer was saying. And now John Herrick's chance of life was hanging on her memory! Nancy was standing beside her, helpless, horrified, unable to be of use until Beatrice should tell her how. She remembered now: she had found the artery where the pulse still beat feebly; she had arranged the pad to press against the bone; she was telling Nancy how to help her twist the bandage tight.

Slowly the trickle of blood lessened, came forth, at last, one drop at a time, and finally ceased altogether. It seemed a long, long wait before John Herrick opened his eyes.

"Was Dolly killed?" he asked first, and then, after a while, "How do you come to be here? Surely you never climbed that trail, you girls, alone?"

It was a grisly nightmare, their attempt to get him up to the level bench of ground where

DEAD MAN'S MILE

he had pitched his camp, but they managed it at last. One effort they made to lift him into Presto's saddle, but it was attended with so little success and such evident agony, that they gave it up.

"There's something broken—besides the cuts in my arm," John Herrick muttered, and lapsed into unconsciousness as they managed to drag him under the shelter of his tent. They propped up his injured arm on a roll of blankets, replenished the fire, and sat down on each side of him to wait until he should rouse himself again.

Although it was high noon the sky was strangely dark, and even under the sheltering wall of the tent the air was growing very cold. Heavy masses of cloud were sailing across the overcast sky, and the mountains were taking on a strange, somber color that was so unfamiliar as to be terrifying.

Looking down, they saw that John Herrick had opened his eyes again and was staring up

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

at them without moving. In answer to the unspoken question in Beatrice's eyes, he began to explain very slowly, with long pauses for rest.

"I fell, very early in the morning, before the dawn, just as the storm was going by. I was riding recklessly in the dark. Poor Dolly knew we were in danger and hung back, but I urged her on. She slipped and I was flung clear, but I could not move. I could hear her scrambling and rolling and falling farther and farther below me, but I could not even turn my head. You say she was really still alive?"

He was quiet for a long time after this effort, but at last spoke again.

"You have made me very comfortable," he said. "You have done everything possible. Now it is time for you to go."

"Go?" echoed Nancy. "Why must we go?"

His eyes were looking beyond her at the threatening sky, and that ominous, deeping

DEAD MAN'S MILE

color of the range opposite. Only one peak, the highest, stood shining above the others, still bathed in fitful sunshine; but in a moment the enveloping shadow had crawled up the slope and quenched its brilliance at last.

John Herrick spoke again, more insistently.

"At the very best it makes me shudder to have you two go down that trail alone, and you must do it while the light is good and there is nothing to hurry you." He struggled to raise himself on his elbow and added sharply, "You are not to delay. You can send some one back to find me."

Nancy got up obediently and went to stand before the tent. The two horses were lingering near the fire: she caught their bridles and waited. It was her elder sister who must decide what they were to do.

A long bank of cloud, seething, boiling, dark below but white at its upper edge, like surf breaking on a reef, was rolling over the summit of the rugged height opposite. The slow

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

roar of the rising wind could be heard stirring the tree-tops in the forest below. Seeing Beatrice hesitate at the door of the tent, John Her-
rick broke forth with the desperate truth.

“There is snow coming. An hour of it will make the trail impassable for you. It will be cold as midwinter before night, and dark long before then. There is not a minute for you to lose. Beatrice, my dear, my dear, what does anything matter if harm comes to you and your sister? Go! Go!”

A breath of wind touched Beatrice for a second and was gone, yet its icy chill cut her to the very bone. Through the comparative warmth of the air about them it had appeared and vanished like the dread ghost of that bitter cold, reigning up yonder where the snows never melted and the ice-fields clung to the mountain-side the whole year through. Nancy shivered, and the brown horse, trembling too, shouldered close to her. But Beatrice, in the door of the tent, turned suddenly to regard

DEAD MAN'S MILE

John Herrick with steady eyes, with a look as fixed and determined as his very own.

“We are not going to leave you,” she said.

CHAPTER XIII

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

A RIDERLESS brown pony, very cautious and very wise, stepping carefully from ledge to ledge, testing his footing and picking his way with the greatest of skill, was the messenger upon whom depended all hope of safety for Beatrice, Nancy, and John Herrick. Tucked under his stirrup leather was a note that Beatrice had scrawled hastily on the scrap of paper that had wrapped their sandwiches. It was addressed to Dr. Minturn and told where they were and how desperate was their need. She had knotted the bridle reins on Presto's neck, turned up the stirrups over the saddle, given him a slap on the flank and told him to “go home.” Every well-trained Western horse knows that order, and will find

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

his way over the steepest trails back to his own stable, nor will he allow himself to be stopped or molested on the way.

“It is lucky we had Presto,” Beatrice said to her sister. “Buck or your horse would have taken twice as long to get home, and Hester and Aunt Anna would be so frightened, though Olaf would have known what to do. As it is, they won’t worry, for I said I might stay another day. I wonder how soon help can come.”

John Herrick, lying very still among the blankets, made no comment. They began to realize that he had summoned all his strength to pretend he was not much hurt and to persuade them to leave him. It was plain that he was suffering intensely, and was resting before trying to go on with what he had to say.

“Unsaddle Nancy’s pony,” he directed at last, “and turn him loose. Without his saddle he will know he is turned out to graze and will not go home. He will drift down the

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

mountain and find shelter somewhere in the timber, for he could not go through the storm here on the hill."

The sides of the tent flapped and quivered in the eddies of the wind as the gale began to blow heavier. Under John Herrick's direction, they rolled stones on the edge of the canvas to keep the blast from creeping under it, and laid larger logs of wood at the back of the fire to make a slower, steadier blaze.

The smoke of the fire, with most of its heat also, was tossed and whirled out into the void, but they were able finally to hang up a spare tarpaulin to reflect the warmth into the tent. The site of the camp had been chosen wisely, being sheltered by a high shoulder of rock, with a nook between two stones to hold the fire, and a small stream pouring over a cliff nearby. Yet, even in this corner, there was not complete protection from the roaring blast that was beginning to carry the first flakes of snow. More than once Beatrice saw the in-

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

jured man's eyes turn anxiously toward the pile of fuel, gathered in abundance for ordinary purposes, but pitifully small for the need that had arisen now. She knew that he would not tell them of the necessity for gathering more, since to seek fire-wood on that wind-swept mountain was a dangerous and difficult task.

“Go into the tent and talk to him, Nancy. Keep him looking another way,” she whispered as she fed the blaze. “I am going down the trail a little way to cut some brush.”

Taking up the small ax from where he had left it beside the fire and turning her coat collar up to her ears, she slipped away before her sister could protest.

The wind whipped about her the moment she passed beyond the sheltering rock, buffeting and blinding her until she thought she would be flung from the ledge. She had never felt such piercing cold. It cut through her coat and made her fingers and feet ache in a

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

moment. Valiantly she struggled forward, getting her bearings gradually and peering this way and that through the driving snow to find the fuel that was so desperately needed. Among the tufts of scrubby bushes that clung here and there to the stony slope, it was difficult to discover anything dry enough to burn. Nor was it easy to cut through the tough, fibrous stems that had clung to the mountain in defiance of so many storms. As she became more used to her task, however, she began to see more and more what she could use; the brisk exercise warmed her, and the armfuls of brush that she carried back and heaped up by the tent began to grow encouragingly high.

"Don't go again," Nancy begged at last. "It is getting dark, and you are going farther and farther away. I know you should not try it any more."

"Only one more trip," Beatrice returned blithely. "I won't leave this upper stretch of trail, and that is safe enough."

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

She was beginning to enjoy her task, to feel a glowing defiance of the wind that pushed and swayed her; and she was conscious of a warming pride in that heap of fuel that meant comfort, even life, to the three of them. This time she went farther afield than before, beyond where she had found John Herrick, along the ledge to a spur of rock where she had guessed a good growth of underbrush might be found in the sheltered hollow. She found that her surmise was correct and harvested a generous fagot of dry brush and some heavier branches. Then she scrambled further along the slope, where a dry, stunted little tree held up its dead and twisted arms against the sky.

“Its trunk will burn famously,” she told herself, perhaps to quiet any misgivings she felt concerning the treacherous ground over which she must pass. Bracing herself, she swung the short-handled ax and cut deep into the wood. Once she struck, and again, then heard the preliminary crack that signaled the surrender of

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the tough old tree. She leaned forward for the last blow—and felt the ground crumble under foot so that she lost her balance and fell. Over and over she rolled, down a long slope of sharp stones that cut her hands and bruised her face, offering no support as, with outstretched hands, she snatched at any hold that would stop her fall.

A little juniper bush, whose branch caught her dress and to whose roots she clung with bleeding, frantic hands, held her at last. Beyond, in a great well of shadows, she could peer down and down, but could see nothing beneath her, could only hear the tinkle of the ax as it struck a stone far below. She shuddered as she looked into that dusky emptiness, then resolutely turned away and clambered up the slope.

“Though how I managed it,” she confessed to Nancy some time afterward, “I simply could n’t tell you. When I rolled down the hill, my heart seemed to be rolling over and

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

over, too, inside me, and it was still doing it all the time I was crawling up again. The stones slipped under my feet, and every bush I took hold of seemed to give way in my hand. It was only because I had to get back to you that I ever scrambled up again.”

Yet when she reached the steadier footing of the trail, she saw the dead tree that had been the cause of her undoing, and setting her teeth, climbed out once more, inch by inch, gave the half-severed trunk a jerk, and brought it away in triumph. She had almost more than she could carry, and her heart was beating fast as she struggled up the path once more, warm, excited, and happy.

“I thought you were never coming back,” said Nancy anxiously. She was kneeling by the fire, stirring something in a tin cup.

“I—I went further than I intended,” Beatrice answered and, for the moment, offered no more extensive report of her adventure. When she went into the tent, however John

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

Herrick opened his eyes to look at her with troubled questioning.

“Where have you been so long?” he asked. “Nancy would not tell me, so I know it was something unsafe.”

“I was just cutting some brush for the fire,” she returned cheerfully. “I took your ax and I—I didn’t bring it back with me.”

His observant blue eyes went over her from head to foot, and his face, drawn with pain though it was, wrinkled to a smile. He did not overlook, as Nancy had done, her damaged skirt and her bleeding knuckles. When he spoke it was so low that she had to stoop down to hear.

“Have I not enough to blame myself for, without having to see some terrible thing happen to you here on this cruel mountain? I am proud that you belong to me, you and that blessed, warm-hearted Nancy. Can you ever forgive me?”

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

“Forgive you for what?” she asked protestingly.

“For all that I have done.”

Nancy came in at this moment, carrying something very carefully.

“Christina told me that when people camp in the snow,” she said, “they warm their beds with hot stones, so I have raked some out of the fire, nice, flat ones, piping hot.”

She packed them in among the blankets with the deftness of a trained nurse, for Nancy was possessed, by nature, of a comforting touch.

“I am better now,” he declared, trying to smile reassuringly upon them both, although the color of his face, ghastly white under the sunburn, belied his words. “I want you to sit down and tell me—” his voice faltered, but in a moment he went on again—” and tell me about Anna. Is she getting well? How long has she been ill? Did she really come here to—to——”

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

His voice trailed away to a gasping whisper, but Beatrice knew what he wished to ask.

"She came to find you," she answered. "You shall hear all about it. No, don't move; it will make your arm begin to bleed again. Lie still and we will tell you everything."

With the wind howling over their heads, but with the slow heat of the fire keeping the worst of the cold at bay, they sat there by him and told the whole of their tale. Sometimes one of them would get up to throw some more fuel upon the flame and the other would take up the story in the interval. Now and then he would ask a half-audible question, but mostly he lay quite quiet, his steady eyes—how like they were to Aunt Anna's!—fixed upon the face of the girl who was speaking. When the account was finished, he had various things to ask, often with long pauses for rest between the words.

"Do you live in the same house—it was the one where your father and Anna and I were

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

born? Does Bridget Flynn still stay with you? Which of you sleeps in the blue room where on stormy nights you can hear the rain in the big chimney?”

Yes, they lived in the house he knew. Bridget Flynn, the old nurse who had cared for them all, was not with them but was still alive. Beatrice had the big south room—it was green now,—but the rain in the chimney was just the same.

“How it does come back!” he said at last with a sigh; “and to think that I have been such a fool as to believe that I could put all that I loved so much behind me.”

His voice failed after that and his questions ceased. They could hear his faint breathing and feel the thin, uneven pulse in his wrist, but he did not move or give other sign of life. The night had closed about them, the storm was still blowing louder, and the cold growing more intense. Snow was piling about the tent, eddying through the opening, lying in

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

white drifts even among the folds of the blankets.

They crept back to the fire at last, both of them wondering miserably at the heaviness of his stupor, but trying to assure themselves that it was really sleep. Very closely they huddled together, sharing the single blanket that was wrapped about them, saying very little but thinking very much.

"Aunt Anna will be going to bed now," Nancy observed, after such long quiet that Beatrice had thought she was nodding. "Christina will be lighting the lamps and tucking in the fur rugs on the sleeping-porch."

Since Beatrice scarcely answered, but sat staring, though with unseeing eyes, at the red coals, Nancy spoke again.

"Are you cold, Beatrice? Are you afraid? How soon do you think help will come?"

"It will come soon," her sister answered confidently. "No, I am not cold, and I am not afraid."

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

Nancy, willing to be reassured, crept closer and allowed her heavy eyelids, weighed down by drowsiness, to fall lower and lower. Beatrice, however, sat erect and wide awake. She was counting the number of hours before Dr. Minturn could get her message, calculating the time their fuel would last. By midnight the final log would be burned, the last bundle of brush would have gone up in windswept sparks. And what was to come when the fire was dead?

She felt strangely quiet in spite of all the dread possibilities before her. She thought over, one by one, all the events in that long, twisted chain of circumstances that had brought her here, and realized all that she had learned, how much she had changed. Could it be possible that she had once been so absorbed in her own affairs, in the pleasures and interests of her single, restricted circle, as to have been blind to her father's anxiety and to Aunt Anna's slowly breaking heart? She had

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

left behind, also, that restless discontent and nameless dissatisfaction that used suddenly to spring up in the midst of the careless happiness of the old life. Even when they first came to live in the cabin she had been filled with anxiety and the weight of unfamiliar responsibility, but such misgivings had disappeared also, blown completely away into the past by the winds of Gray Cloud Mountain. Here she had learned new things, had felt new strength, had begun to play a part in the real affairs of life.

Nancy, leaning against her, had dropped sound asleep and Beatrice herself dozed at last. Her last clear thought had been of Dabney Mills. Even the puzzle of his suspicions would be solved, she felt sure. But why had he thought——?

Her eyes closed and opened again with a start upon a different world. She could not tell how long a time had passed. The storm was over, the moon was up and the whole

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

mountain-side was bathed in light. Leaning forward, she attempted to look down into the valley and was surprised to see no valley there. A level floor of clouds, as smooth as the surface of a lake, but of a strange, shadowy whiteness that no water could ever show, lay below her, a flood of mist that filled Broken Bow Valley to the brim. Fascinated, she sat watching, while the moonlight grew clearer and the soft white turned to glistening silver. Although she thought herself awake, she dozed again, for she had a dim idea that she could walk forth on the smooth level of that white floor, past the mountain tops, straight away toward the moon, while all the time another self sat cold and nodding by the fire, feeding the failing flame mechanically, with one arm around the slumbering Nancy. Vaguely she knew that complete oblivion would mean the end of the fire, the quenching of the warmth that kept them alive and of the light that was to be a signal to their rescuers.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

How she longed to lay down her head and give herself up to slumber! How far away her dream was carrying her, out across that white sea whose further edge seemed to roll across the peaks and break against the stars! Some inward spirit kept her faithful to her task, even after real consciousness had vanished. When she did give up to heavy slumber it was only when her work was done, when her drowsy ears heard afar the chink of iron hoofs upon the trail, heard the scrambling of feet and the sound of men's voices coming nearer.

"They are coming; they see us," she thought, and her head dropped upon her arm in absolute exhaustion.

It must have been only for a moment that she slept, although it seemed that hours must have passed when she awoke with a jump to a bewildered confusion of sights and sounds. The red light of a lantern was flashing in her face, the huge, grotesque shadow of a horse's

“OLD FRIENDS AND OLD TIMES”

head danced back and forth on the rock wall beside her, and Dr. Minturn's voice sounded in her ear.

“Beatrice, are you safe? Are you alive?”

Dazzled and confused, she rubbed her eyes, then motioned toward the tent where John Herrick lay, since words of explanation would not come quickly enough. She held her breath, so it seemed to her, through all the minutes that the doctor was bending to examine the unconscious man. When he straightened up again to speak to her, how comforting it was to hear that big voice booming out where the last sound had been John Herrick's failing whisper!

“He has gone a long way,” the old doctor said, “but please heaven, we 'll bring him back again.”

CHAPTER XIV

HASTY WORDS

IN the gray light that is the ghost of morning, a fantastic procession went slowly down the headlong slope of Dead Man's Mile. The tall doctor strode ahead with his swinging lantern, and behind him came the two men he had brought, carrying John Herrick between them upon a litter of blankets. Nancy, following them clung fast to her pommel and was glad the saddle was so deep that she could not well fall out of it, no matter how much the doctor's pony, upon which she was mounted, swayed and slid down the path. For guidance, he was left almost as much to himself as was the extra horse following at the end of the line, whose nose was so close to the tail of the pony that Beatrice rode, and whose footsteps

HASTY WORDS

were guided by the second lantern that bobbed and jerked from her saddle-bow.

“It was the next thing to impossible to climb up in bright daylight,” Beatrice thought. “How can we ever go down in the dark, with a helpless person to carry?”

But the doctor had declared that further delay meant too much danger to John Her-rick, and that the attempt must be made. Down they went, past the rocky shelf where the girls had found him, past the dizzy precipice where Beatrice had dropped the ax and had so nearly followed it, over barriers that looked impassable, down steep declivities that were nothing but wells of blackness and hidden danger. A word of direction from the doctor, a breathless squeak from Nancy once when her horse lurched suddenly beneath her, the steady scuffle of the ponies’ feet—those were the only sounds. They had passed the icy shallows of the tumbling stream, they had looped over the jutting shoulder of smooth

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

rock where there was scarcely a foothold: there was a long, stiff-legged jump for each pony, and they were down.

Through the rustling underbrush of the lower slope, the main trail leading downward from Gray Cloud Pass was firm under their feet.

“Looks like Broadway, don’t it, after that squirrel track back yonder?” observed one of the men, as they stopped to rest for a little. The other man went to catch Nancy’s pony which had been turned loose before the storm and which now came, stamping and snorting, through the dark, drawn by the lantern light and by the desire for company of its own kind.

It was possible to carry the litter between two horses now, so that the doctor mounted, left one man to follow on foot, and ordered them all to press forward. A moving shadow in the darkness proved to be John Herrick’s black mare, who had managed to scramble

HASTY WORDS

to her feet and stood, with head drooping and one leg helpless, beside the path.

"We can't stop for her now," the doctor said. "I will send some one back to see if there is anything to be done."

The poor creature was left behind, although Beatrice leaned from her saddle to touch the soft anxious nose that was thrust out to her, and although a pleading whinny could be heard long after the darkness had swallowed up the suffering pony.

They went on steadily and quickly now, with Beatrice nodding in her saddle from unbelievable weariness. They were fording a stream; they were threading the grove of aspen-trees; they had reached the last mile of their journey. The whispering leaves were all speaking together in the morning breeze; the birds were beginning to sing; the darkness had faded so that the light of Beatrice's lantern had shrunk to the pale ghost of a flame.

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

She looked back to see the bare granite slope above her turn from gray to rose, and to see the stark summit of Gray Cloud Mountain shine in sudden silver radiance as the sunrise touched it.

Almost immediately she saw the men ahead of her stop, dismount, and lean over the litter.

"He is awake, and I think he wants you," one of them said to Nancy, but she listened and shook her head.

"He is not really conscious," she answered, "and it is my Aunt Anna that he is asking for."

It was a week, a dragging, interminable week, before any one was able to know just what were to be the results of that fateful expedition up the slopes of Gray Cloud Mountain. Nancy, stiff and aching in every muscle from so much unwonted riding, was the first to recover and to set about her housekeeping. Beatrice had sprained her knee in that perilous moment when she dropped the ax over

HASTY WORDS

the mountain-side, but she had scarcely noticed the mishap until, slipping from the saddle at her own door, she found herself unable to walk into the house. For three days she was almost helpless; by the end of seven, however, she was able to get about and help Nancy and Christina with their work.

Christina had come to stay at the cabin so that the girls might not be alone, for Aunt Anna had moved to John Herrick's house. It seemed at first that she had found her brother only in time to part with him again, for through four terrible days he lay so ill that not even Dr. Minturn could have much hope. Perhaps no one knew until that dreadful time how brave Aunt Anna could be. It was she who was cheerful; it was she who was hopeful and kept up the courage of the others; it was her tired, white, but smiling face upon which John Herrick's eyes first fell when he opened them to consciousness again.

The three girls were standing in the door

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

and Dr. Minturn was with them, but it was only his sister that John Herrick saw.

"Anna," he said, "I have had a bad dream, I think."

"Yes," she nodded gravely. "We have all been dreaming, but at last we are all awake."

His eyes went to the window where, in the hot sun of brilliant noonday, the moving tree-tops showed their densest green and the far mountains stood blue against a bluer sky. He looked doubtful for a moment, as though he had expected to find himself in his old home, in that room where the rain in the chimney had lulled him to sleep through childhood nights. When he remembered all that had happened since, would he shrink away again into that isolation he had made for himself? They could actually see, from the changes in his face, just how the flood of memories rose and swept over him, recalling everything, from his accident on the hill back to that day when he had vowed to shut the door of home behind him forever.

HASTY WORDS

At last he turned to his sister again and smiled.

"I thought I could never forgive all of you," he said, "and it was you, this whole long time, who should have forgiven me. Through all these years I have been remembering how I went away, how I looked into that row of serious faces, and thought I read doubt in every one of them. Yes, Anna dear, I know you believed in me still; I know you called after me; but I vowed it was too late. I heard your voice as I closed the door: it has followed me ever since, but I would not listen. Can you forgive me?"

The girls slipped away and Dr. Minturn closed the door.

"He'll do," he said gruffly. "He won't need any of us to cure him now."

A man who has spent the last ten years in the free open and the bracing air of the Rocky Mountains does not linger long upon a sick bed when once he has begun to recover. John Herrick was sitting up in a week's time and

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

was able to limp about the house at the end of ten days. As his strength grew, so did Aunt Anna's, so that step by step they came along the road of health together.

"Isn't she wearing herself out nursing him?" Beatrice asked Dr. Minturn anxiously, but he only laughed.

"It never harms people to do what they like most in the world," he answered. "I can hardly tell which of the two is getting well the faster. They have no further need for me, so I will be getting back to Miriam. I can leave the whole affair in your capable hands, Miss Beatrice."

Beatrice laughed, yet flushed with pleasure that the doctor should voice such confidence in her. She could not help feeling a little thrill of pride when she thought how well things were turning out. Even the black mare was hobbling about the corral, giving promise that she could be ridden almost as soon as John Herrick would be able to mount her.

HASTY WORDS

There was still the affair in the village to be made clear, but of that Beatrice had thought very little lately, and not at all of Dabney Mills.

A growing restlessness on Christina's part was the first reminder of what was going on about them.

"I don't want to go," she explained when, on Aunt Anna's returning to the cabin, Christina announced that she was needed at home; "but I am anxious when I am away from Thorvik. I never know what new things he is thinking up."

She had waited to wash the evening dishes, lingering over them as though she were unwilling to finish, but she had said a reluctant good-by at last and had gone away down the hill. Beatrice sat on the doorstep looking after her, and lingered long after she was gone, watching the darkness deepen between the tree trunks, and the fireflies moving to and fro. It had been an over-busy day with the result

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

that she was very tired. It was surely the worst possible moment that Dabney Mills could have chosen to come striding through the dark, whistling with irritating shrillness.

"There are all sorts of rumors about John Herrick's being hurt," he began at once, "so I came up to see if I could get the real facts. I tried to interview the old doctor when he was down in the village, but I didn't have much satisfaction. Now, you will have no objection to telling me a few things, I feel sure."

On that very spot, Beatrice thought, he had been told once, twice, it was difficult to say how many times, that his presence was unwelcome and that he would be told nothing. Yet here he was again, as inquisitive and as well-assured of success as ever.

"I don't see why you keep coming and asking things," she said irritably, "when we never tell you anything."

"A fellow can never tell," he replied easily, "where he can pick up a few facts, even in the

HASTY WORDS

most unlikely places. I won't say this is a very hopeful one, but there's nowhere else to go. I hear your aunt has been nursing Her-rick. Now I could make something very interesting out of that."

His insinuating grin, half visible in the dark, was quite beyond bearing.

"Why should n't she be nursing him when she is his own sister?" she cried hotly, a sudden burst of temper driving her quite beyond the bounds of prudence.

Dabney's mouth opened to speak, but no words came—only at last a long whistle of astonishment.

"Sister!" he ejaculated; then repeated it to himself, "Sister!"

Beatrice said nothing, for she began to have an uneasy feeling that harm might come from her hasty speech.

"But look-a-here," Dabney Mills burst out, "if she's his sister and he's your uncle, why did you never let on to any one? You were

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

strangers to him, you two girls, when you came here: I could swear it. And one day when you were out, I asked your aunt if she had ever seen John Herrick, and she said no."

Still Beatrice was silent, with growing misgivings, as he went on excitedly, as much to himself as to her.

"There must have been a family quarrel," he speculated shrewdly. "Herrick did something disgraceful, most likely, back there at home, and came West to lose himself, and the rest of you followed, by and by, to see him; but you never owned he belonged to you. Say, that's something to tell them down yonder at the meeting to-night. When they hear that about his past, they may know for sure where to look for their money."

He swung on his heel and was off in haste down the hill.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Beatrice, but he paid no heed. She ran a few steps after him but he had already disappeared.

HASTY WORDS

As she went into the house, she was thinking of that boulder that had rolled from under her horse's feet on the climb up Dead Man's Mile. She remembered how it bounded down the slope, disappearing in the wood to do what damage she could not tell. In much the same way her thoughtless speech had escaped from her and now, quite beyond her reach, was doing harm at which she could only guess.

They all retired early that night, for Aunt Anna, who had just come home, was tired as well as happy, and Nancy had been so busy that she could not hold her eyes open even until a decent hour for bedtime. In spite of her uneasy thoughts, Beatrice fell asleep quickly, and, even after an hour of sound slumber, awoke with difficulty.

"It is raining," she thought sleepily at first, hearing a light tap, tap against the casement. "I must get up and close the window."

Yet she would have dropped asleep again had not the sound continued insistently. She

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

rubbed the sleep from her eyes and sat up. To her surprise, the stars were shining through the window, and no raindrops but a handful of gravel pattered on the sill. She jumped up, drew her big coat about her, for the night air was cold, and leaned out. A shadowy figure, unrecognizable in the starlight, stood below her.

"Miss Deems," came a voice, a rich Irish voice that after a moment of doubt she realized was Dan O'Leary's, the man who used to care for Buck; "Miss Deems, there's the deuce and all to pay down in the town to-night, and this Dabney Mills here vows that it was your doing."

She discerned then a second figure skulking among the shadows, a very crestfallen Dabney Mills, brought hither evidently by no desire of his own.

"He came to the meeting," went on Dan, "and gave us a long tale of how John Herick's past had come out at last, how he had

HASTY WORDS

got into disgrace back East and came here to lose himself and take another name. And from that he argues that it was John Herrick took the money we have all been looking for this long time. I thought it only best to come straight to you for the truth, since the fellow here was quoting you."

Poor Beatrice's teeth chattered with cold and misery as she leaned against the window-frame and, below her breath, tried to explain just how matters stood. Had Aunt Anna been wakeful, she would have been reading in the room below and would have overheard, but fortunately she was sleeping soundly on the sleeping-porch at the other side of the house.

"Some of what he said is half true," Beatrice began, "and some of it is all false." Dan O'Leary listened to the end of her story without comment.

"I was hoping you could give him the lie direct," he said finally. "The men below are wild with anger and are coming up the hill

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

to tax John Herrick with wrecking the company. They were walking and we had horses, but they 'll not be so long behind us. Well, I 'll go back and stop them if I can."

"Could n't you—could n't you go up the hill and warn him?" Beatrice asked desperately.

"No, they 'd call me traitor if I did, for, though I 'm a good friend to John Herrick, after all I 'm one with those below and pledged to help them. We 'll be going back now. I 'll do the best I can. Here," to Dabney, "get on your horse and come along. It 's just such know-nothings as you that let loose most of the mischief in the world."

After they had gone, Beatrice still stood, clinging to the window-frame, stunned and bewildered. This, then, was the result of her angry words; this was the mischief that she had set on foot. What could she do to make amends? She did not have to think long, but she turned from the window with a sigh that was nearer a groan. She must lay the whole

HASTY WORDS

matter before John Herrick, tell him the real truth of what she had said and what had been the result. He could never forgive her; of that she felt sure. She had put an end, all in a minute, to that new-found trust and friendliness that had been so hardly won. Yet it was the only thing to do.

Buck, who had been brought home a week before, sprang up from his straw bed at the sound of his mistress's footsteps. He submitted, for once, to being saddled without protest, as though he had been too full of curiosity concerning this strange night adventure to make any delay.

Down the path to the gate they made their way, then up the trail as fast as Buck could be urged, with Beatrice's head turned over her shoulder to peer down at the town below. One building was brilliantly lighted—the hall where the men's meetings were held. There were lights in many of the houses, too, although it was so nearly midnight. Then, carried by

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the chill wind that blew up from the valley, came the far-off sound of shouting voices from the throng of angry men who were marching up the trail.

John Herrick's house was alight also, for he was a person of late hours. She could see, as she came near, that he was sitting by the big table in the living-room and that Hester was nodding over a book in the chair beside him. Since he was up and about again, she seemed unwilling to leave him for a moment. Beatrice knocked, but could not wait for an answer and burst in upon them, beginning to pour out her story before she was half-way across the room.

Hester, starting up, listened in frank bewilderment, but the expression on John Herrick's face was quite different. Her tale was none too plain, but he seemed to guess, long before she had finished, what it was she was trying to say.

"Tell me," he said at last when she paused;

HASTY WORDS

"tell me one thing." Her heart sank, for his eyes were hard and his tone was harsh and dry.

"Why did you come here? Was it to warn me, so that I could go away?"

"Oh, no, no," she gasped, still breathless and incoherent. "I only felt that you ought to know what harm I had done. I wanted you to be ready to explain to the men when they came that it was I who had——"

"Do you mean," he interrupted her, leaning forward in his chair, his eyes fixed on her with a strange, intense eagerness; "do you mean that you do not believe as they do? That you don't suspect me of stealing that money?"

The blank astonishment on Beatrice's face was answer enough.

"It wouldn't be possible!" she declared simply.

He leaned back, and put his hand over his face as though suddenly weary.

"God bless you, Beatrice," he said. "I will

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

remember that always, that you believed in me.”

He rose slowly, limped across the room, and opened the door of a safe, let into the wall between two bookcases. He brought out two steel boxes, and set them on the table.

“Now go and open the doors,” he said, “so that when our friends arrive, they can come in at once.”

While he unlocked the boxes, Hester went to do as he had directed; but Beatrice, wondering and fascinated, could not leave his side. The first lid that he lifted showed bundles of bank-notes, and the second, shining piles of heavy gold pieces.

“Yes, this is the money that was missing,” he said.

CHAPTER XV

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

FOR a little time there was no sound in the big room as Beatrice stood gazing in open-mouthed astonishment at the piles of gold and silver pieces heaped upon the table, while Hester stood at the outer door to listen. The night sounds of the mountain came in: the wind among the trees, the squeaking of a bat, the far-off yelp of a coyote. Presently, however, these faint noises were drowned in another, distant but growing nearer and louder, the angry voices of excited men and the tramp of feet upon the road.

Beatrice went to the door beside Hester and, for what seemed a very long time, stood waiting without a word spoken by any one of them, so intently were they all listening. Much as

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

Beatrice desired that John Herrick should explain the presence of that money upon the table, she dreaded his speaking, for she wished to lose no sound of the tumult that was coming ever nearer up the hill.

The crowd of men was in sight now, climbing the last rise of the trail. They were singing some wild foreign song: it might have been Russian, Polish, Hungarian; she knew not which. The words conveyed no meaning to her, but the loud harsh cadences seemed to cry out a message of their own: a song of blind tyrannies and passionate rebellion, of cracking whips and pistol-shots, of villages burning amid curses and weeping and the cries of children. She shivered with terror as the shouting voices came close.

"If only they were Americans," she whispered to Hester. How could any one control such a mob which scarcely understood a common tongue?

"There is no knowing what they may do,"

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

Hester whispered in answer, "but if any one is able to quiet them, Roddy can."

The men came tramping up to the foot of the veranda steps and stopped—a dense, huddled throng with a tossing lantern carried here and there that showed the dark faces and the shining, excited eyes. A few figures stood out against the foreign backgrounds: a handful of American and Irish laborers, Dan O'Leary, head and shoulders taller than the others, Dabney Mills hovering on the outskirts of the group, talking incessantly and entirely unheeded.

Thorvik stood on the lowest step, his back to them, bareheaded and pouring out a stream of eloquence. Two or three men stepped up to him and began an earnest discussion, which waxed hotter and hotter as the minutes passed, as the crowd quieted, and as all stood waiting. Dabney Mills joined them, shaking his head and protesting vehemently. Beatrice, leaning forward, caught enough of the broken

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

English to understand the meaning of their hesitation. They were arguing as to which should go in first. Inside a great sum of money was spread out upon the table, with no one to guard it but an injured man and two girls, yet these disturbers of the night's peace were quarreling as to who should enter first.

It was Dan O'Leary who pushed through the crowd finally and strode up the steps. The girls turned to watch him cross the hall and stop before the table where John Herrick sat unmoving.

"Well, boss," the Irishman said simply, "how about it?"

John Herrick's thin face relaxed into a smile.

"Why don't your friends come in?" he asked.

"They're a bit shy," Dan admitted. "I hear them talking it over how you can shoot straighter than any other man in Broken Bow County."

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

John Herrick's smile grew broader and he got to his feet.

"Then I suppose I must go out to them," he said, "if they won't come in."

He limped slowly across the hall and out upon the steps, while a great roar went up from the men as he appeared.

"The money of which there has been so much talk is in there on my table. Is there any man who cares to come in to count it?"

There was no answer, nor did any one come forward. Thorvik, hurrying from one to another, whispering, pointing, urging, seemed to have no influence at all. Dabney Mills, shrill and abusive, shouted something from the back of the crowd, but no one moved. Dan O'Leary burst into a great roar of laughter and slapped his knee.

"You should have heard them tell, on the way up the mountain, what they were going to do," he declared to Beatrice at whose side

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

he was standing. "Thorvik and Mills, why, they were breathing fire, and now look at them." He stepped forward and stood by John Herrick. "Boys," he said, "I'm through. I came up here with you to ask the boss a question, to find out if he had got away with any of the Irrigation Company's funds. Well, I don't care any more to ask it. I know he's all right."

Beatrice turned at a sound behind her and saw Olaf, followed by old Julia and Tim, come pushing through the door in the hall within. The man and the woman were both deaf and the boy slept in one of the outbuildings, so that they had only just now been awakened by the noise. Olaf's eye was fixed unwaveringly upon Thorvik, and that worthy, suddenly becoming aware of the fact began to sidle away into the background and disappeared behind the bulk of a gigantic Slovak. Beatrice laid a restraining hand on Olaf's arm, for John Herrick was speaking again.

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

“You shall have an explanation,” he began, “though I have been waiting for you to understand of yourselves. While you were talking up your strike, or rather while your leader was talking and you were listening, the Irrigation Company was coming to the end of its funds. Why? Because, after your valuable Thorvik came to this camp, construction dragged, no man did a full day’s work any more, time and material and money were being wasted until the whole enterprise was at the edge of disaster. Was it easy to raise more capital, do you think, when the whole place was seething with discontent and everybody knew that a strike was coming? No, the men who had put money into the project, far from being willing to subscribe more, were wishing they could withdraw. It came about that we moved first, and shut down the work the very night that you were ready to declare a strike. It was a good thing for both sides. We all needed a little time to think things over.”

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

He paused, as though for comment from his audience, but no one spoke and he went on again.

“While you have been—resting, I have been working, and I have managed to arrange for enough capital to carry on the work to the end, on one condition. When things are not to your liking, you are to use the good American way of talking things over and settling them peaceably, not the method you brought with you from over the sea, of rioting and burning and stirring up hatred between one man and another. On that basis we can go on. In a crisis like this it is always easiest to blame one man, and you have chosen to blame me. What you have been saying about me I neither know nor care, but if you had used your own wits instead of Thorvik’s, you would have seen how things really stood. And I will tell you this. Through all this time of waiting, I have kept in my safe a sufficient sum in cash for immediate use, so that when the time came to begin

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

again, we could go forward without a day's, without an hour's delay. It is there, as I said, ready for you to earn it. And now have you had enough of Thorvik and his talk of revolutions? Do you want to go back to work?

"We want to go back," shouted a voice from the crowd.

It was an American voice, but its refrain was taken up in a dozen foreign tongues. Yes, it was plain that they were weary of their leader and that they wished to work again.

"Then go home and get some sleep and we will start work in the morning," John Herrick said. "The money will be there to pay your next week's wages and there will be enough for one thing besides. It will buy your precious Thorvik a ticket back to his own country and we will all see that he makes use of it."

"But—see here," Dabney Mills' querulous voice rose above the murmur of approval, "I've be telling them——"

Then it was that Beatrice had the greatest

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

surprise of all her life. She suddenly found herself standing on the step beside John Herrick, telling what had happened, making plain to that strange, listening group, what was the source of Dabney's story. With her hand holding to her uncle's, she spoke out bravely and told the whole truth—just what had really occurred and just how the reporter had spied and listened and questioned and put together his so-called facts. She even found herself at the end, telling of Dabney's inglorious encounter with the bear.

Although the men did not understand much English, her speech was so direct that they could easily comprehend the greater part of it. When she came to the story of the bear, such a shout of laughter went up that it drowned what little more she might have wished to say. The men slapped each other on the shoulder, told the story all over again to one another in their own tongues, rocked and chuckled and burst forth again and again in uproarious



Beatrice found herself telling what had happened

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

mirth. It seemed to touch the sense of humor of every one of them that the strutting, vain-glorious young reporter should have been the hero of such an ignominious adventure. When the gale of merriment had somewhat laughed itself out, Dan O'Leary's voice could be heard above the others.

"We don't need any more proof that they belong to each other," he said. "The pluck of the little one and the pluck of the big one, they sure come from the same stock. And now let's be getting back and be ready for work in the morning. We need n't spend our time waiting for Sherlock Holmes. He has gone on ahead, and another of our friends with him."

Under cover of the noisy laughter, two people had quietly slipped away. A pair of shadows flitting down the trail, a slim one and a sturdy one, were the last that Beatrice ever saw of Dabney Mills and of Thorvik.

The crowd dispersed, and went trudging

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

down the mountainside, as John Herrick had advised, to sleep in preparation for the work next day. Their voices and laughter could be heard from afar as they wound down the path—a cheery, comforting sound after the angry shouts and that wild, terrible song that had heralded their coming. Beatrice, standing to look after them, felt a sudden wave of friendliness and good-will for the whole company, which, a short time before, she had regarded with such terror and repulsion.

She went in at last to talk the whole matter over with John Herrick and Hester and Olaf and Dan O'Leary, who had stayed behind. They heard the whole tale, not only of the irrigation project, but of all that had led up to it. The story was of a man beginning with nothing and in ten years gathering the fortune that he was now putting into the watering of the valley. It was wealth reaped from the fertile, untried resources and the open-handed opportunities of a new country. The valley

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

was in the hands of prospectors and homesteaders when he came. He had seen the mines opened, the farms plowed from virgin soil, the wilderness changed to a settled country. After the pioneers and the farmers, had come the crowd of foreign laborers, to build the railroads, to pick the fruit, to rear the houses and dig the irrigation ditches.

"They are a blight on the country," said Olaf, but John Herrick shook his head.

"We need them," he insisted. "We have to help them and teach them; and their children will be good Americans. There are a few like Thorvik who will cause trouble to the end of the chapter, but we can make something of the rest of them."

It was the mountain above them that alone had not changed, he went on to tell them, although it was the mountain that had made the valley what it was. It had given its treasures of gold and silver, the timber and pasturage of its lower slopes; its roaring streams watered

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

the fields and the valley was fertile with soil washed from its rocky shoulders.

“A good part of the mountain belongs to me,” John Herrick said, “and a bit of it to Beatrice, too. I can go higher and higher, blasting its rocks, cutting its trees, but at a certain point I have to stop. There is no man yet who has conquered the wind and clouds and cold of the summit, and Gray Cloud Mountain is still master of us all.”

When at last he ceased talking, it was only because Hester had dropped asleep in her chair and the gray dawn was showing behind the windows. Beatrice was still listening eagerly, and so was Olaf, who heaved a long sigh as the story came to an end.

“I wish I were going to do things like that,” he said wistfully.

“You are,” returned John Herrick, “and so is Beatrice, and Hester, too. There are just such adventures ahead of all of you, in times like these: every person who is growing up

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

now will find his share of strange, new things to do. Now you must take Beatrice home, Olaf. You children should not have let me talk the whole night away."

Dan O'Leary, who had said very little, got up and held out his hand to Olaf as he said good-by.

"We'll be glad to see you down in the town," he declared. "We've got over some things we used to think about you, and we've learned a great deal this night."

They rode slowly down the hill, and Beatrice and Olaf turned in at her gate, still discussing the night's adventure.

"He is a real man, John Herrick is," was Olaf's final verdict as they reached the steps of the cabin. "You can't beat him for fairness or for pluck. And you know, the first time I saw you, I thought you were like him. I believe I had begun to understand that you belonged to each other long before any one told me so."

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

She lingered on the steps, watching him lead Buck away to his stable and then mount his own horse.

"I ride like a sailor," he admitted as he climbed into the saddle, "and—I did n't tell you—I am going to sea again next week. My mother does n't like my going but I can't stop ashore more than this long. Now that all this trouble is cleared up, I will go down to stay with her until I leave. And you will go to see her sometimes, won't you, after I am gone?"

"Yes," promised Beatrice, "but we are going ourselves before very long. I can't believe the summer has really passed. Hester is coming with us to go to the school where Nancy and I go, and John Herrick—can I ever call him anything else, I wonder—is coming too. But in a year we will all be back again."

He rode away, leaving her sitting on the steps, still wide awake and reluctant to go in. The cabin was very still, since evidently no one had awakened to miss her in the hours

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

that she had been gone. She sat very quietly, watching the sky grow red between the black columns of the pine-trees, listening to the soft thunder of the waterfall and the growing chorus of the birds as they awoke with the awakening dawn.

An approaching footstep surprised her. Some one had come very softly up the needle-strewn pathway while she sat there dreaming. It was a figure that she did not recognize at once—a person with outlandish clothes, and a yellow face, and with two bundles done up in blue cotton handkerchiefs hung on the pole upon his shoulder. After a moment of inspection she exclaimed:

“Joe Ling!”

The Chinaman nodded.

“I leave your house because trouble was coming,” he explained. “Trouble over now,” he waved his hand toward the village; “I come back again.”

By some secret sense through which China-

THE HILL OF ADVENTURE

men seem to know everything, he had got news of the outbreak in the town almost before it had occurred and had departed; but now, divining just as quickly that the difficulty was over, he had returned. There could be no more convincing proof that peace and quiet were really restored in Ely.

Beatrice thought for a moment, inclined at first to send him away. She was beginning to be more used to the strange ways of Chinamen, however. "And besides," she reflected, "it will not do Nancy and me any harm to have a vacation from our work for these last days that we are here."

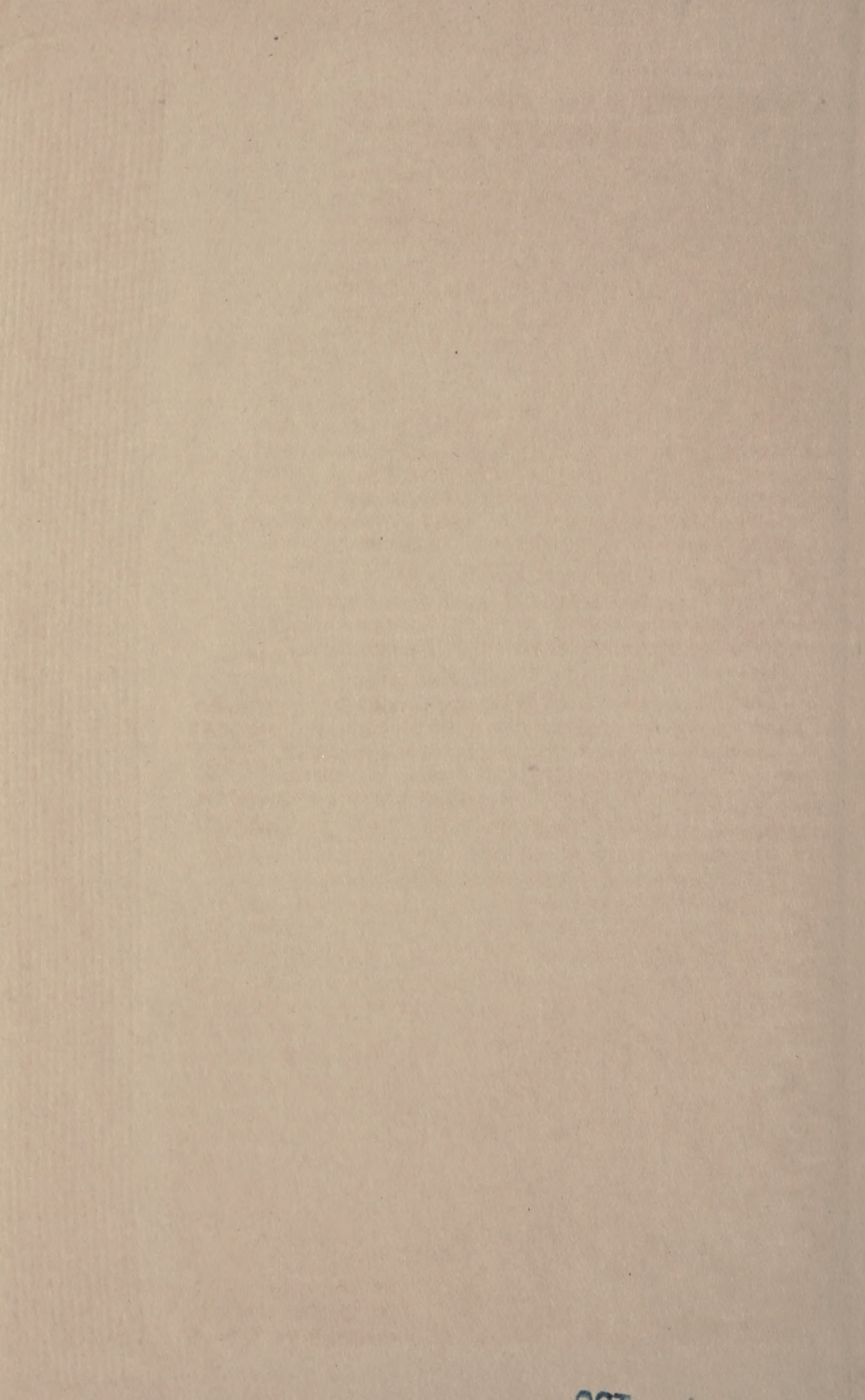
She nodded to Joe Ling and he made his way around the corner of the house, to be heard presently in the kitchen making preparations for breakfast as easily as though he had been in residence a twelvemonth.

She would soon be going back to all the old interests, she thought, still without moving—back to lessons, dances, club meetings. How

A SONG FROM OVER THE SEA

far away that had all seemed to be! Everything would look different to her now. She would never be discontented again nor wonder if the future was going to be dull, since she had once realized how much life can hold.

Leaning back against the door-post, she sat contentedly staring out across the hill. In the room upstairs Nancy was stirring, for Beatrice heard the window close. Soon she would have to go in to relate all that had happened in the night, but just for a minute more she would watch the glowing sky, the moving tree-tops and the peak of Gray Cloud Mountain showing clear and sharp in the first light of dawn.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00024650339